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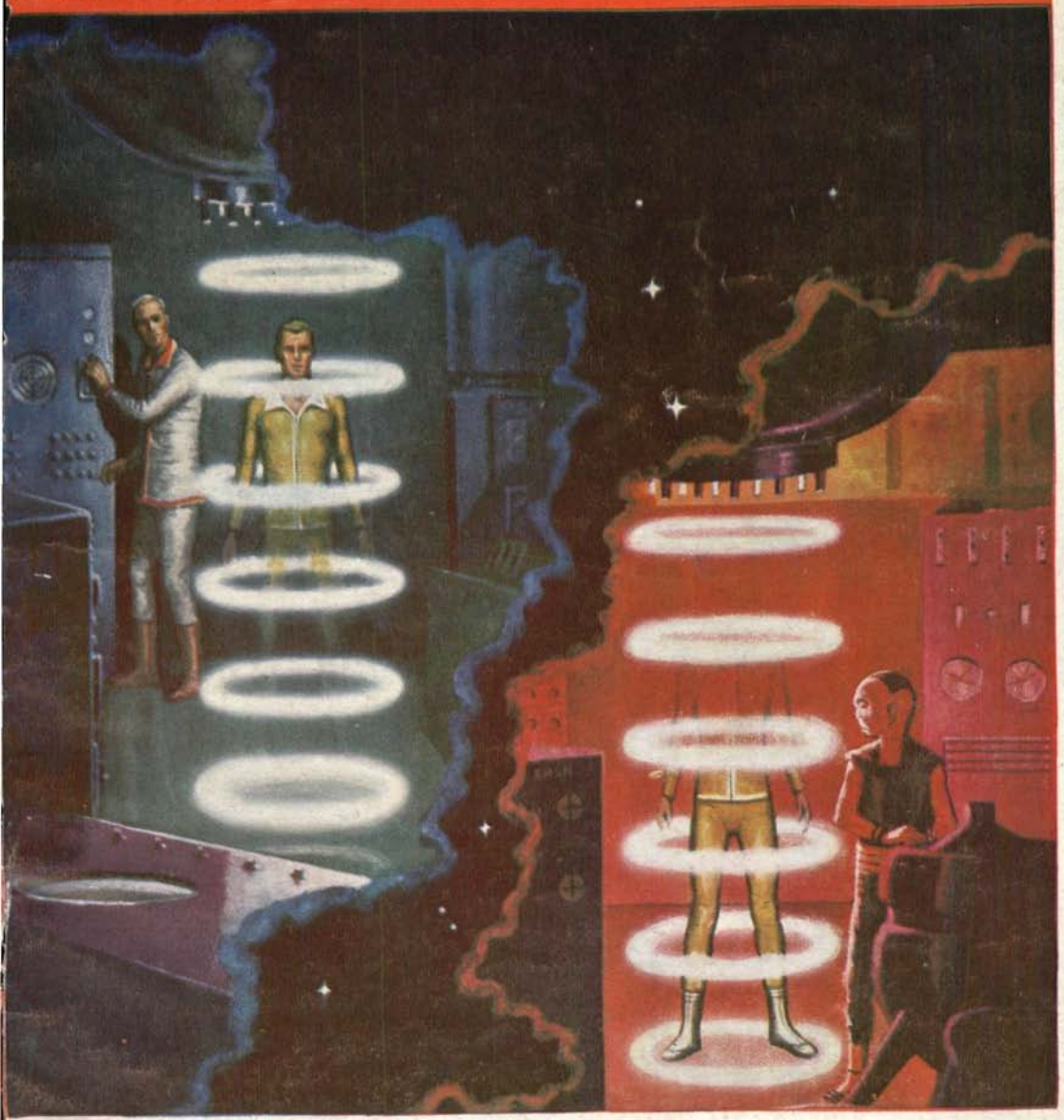

featuring **HALOS, INC.** *a novel by Kendell Foster Crossen*

and an article by **ISAAC ASIMOV**

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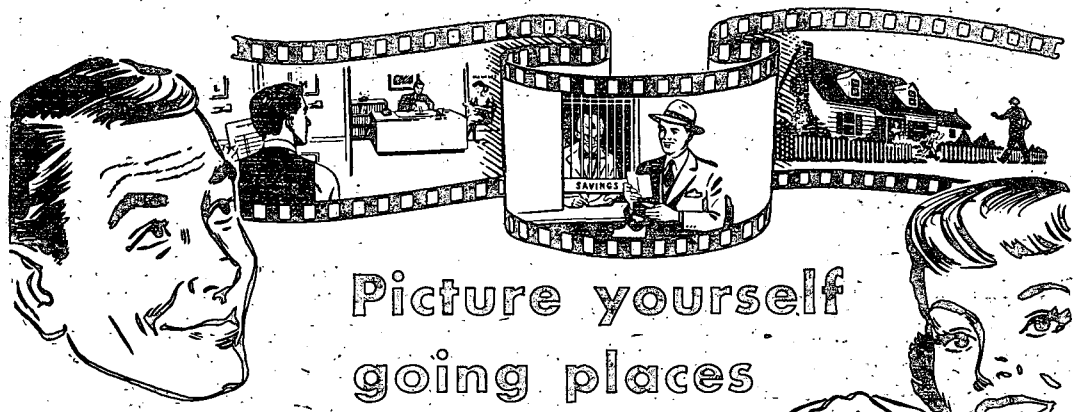

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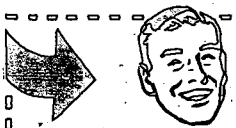

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IT'S A FACT!

Science News in Brief

The delta wing seems to be the hottest thing on the designing boards at aircraft factories these days. Look for the planes and rockets of the near future to sport the distinctive triangle shape.

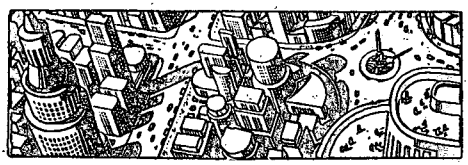
For military planes human pilots are becoming obsolete. When guided ships can carry H-bombs to any spot on the globe and deliver them accurately upon the target, why waste human lives?

Fresh water from the sea has now passed through the experimental stage into the commercial. The first plants may be operating in 1953 to produce large quantities of water for irrigation.

Setting up the programs for electronic brains—the biggest time-consuming factor—is on the way to being solved. New computers will be taught to set up their own programs, bringing them one step closer to the development of that initiative which could begin to resemble independent thinking.

A future risk factor in rocket travel is foreshadowed in reports from air fields that low-mounted jet motors on present planes are destroying runways and that leaking fuel on runways presents an even greater danger from the blast flames. Rocket take-off cradles will have to be designed with this in mind.

Though the white races are the heavy drinkers of the world, alcoholic indulgence is pretty universal. Only pre-Columbian America north of Mexico and the Polynesian Islands were relatively dry and these spots are considerably dampened by now.



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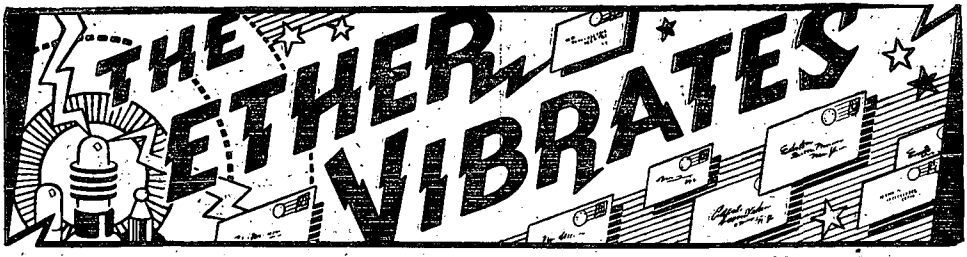

UP TO a few days ago the words Cerebral Palsy represented to us an imperfectly understood disease vaguely classed in terror with polio. If you too happened to intersect the recent Cerebral Palsy drive you are now poorer by several dollars from which you parted willingly, and a great deal clearer as to what this crippler is like. If you saw the children we saw on our television screen your heart was wrung as it has seldom been wrung. Polio is kind to its victims by comparison.

We saw something else that brought us back to science fiction again. In addition to the children, there was a 28-year-old man named Emik Avakian. He was helpless almost beyond the power of words to describe. His body, wasted, distorted, was frozen in the grip of the throttling disease. His arms and legs were helpless. He seemed able to move only his head, and this movement was far from under control so that the head moved and bobbed continually in spite of himself. He spoke—and each word was wrenched with ghastly, twisting effort past locked muscles and stubborn lips, bursting forth at last in a kind of explosive groan. More than medical help was necessary, he said. A means of expression was essential to provide some human dignity, for without human dignity, life was not worth living.

To one who takes speech and movement and the absence of pain for granted it might be easy to wonder why Emik Avakian finds life worth living at all. People far less handicapped have lost all courage and will to go on. And what if in addition to everything else, because of his difficulties in speech, the palsy victim is classed as an imbecile?

This, too, happened to Emik Avakian. An immigrant, he was at first denied admission to the United States on the grounds that he was mentally defective. He happens to be a brilliant mathematician and physicist, an electronics expert and an inventor. Admitted at last to this country, he put himself through Columbia University, taking a Master's Degree, and is now electronics consultant for the International Business Machines Corporation.

In going through school, Avakian had to depend upon typists with whom he had some difficulty in making himself understood. His next step, therefore, was to invent a typewriter he could run himself. For this job he had the help of Tim Ewald, a medical student, and Dick Loose, electronics student, who did the electrical work. Avakian planned the machine, the other two boys built it.

To a standard electric typewriter they hooked up an electronic brain or computer, of the type we have before now discussed. This particular brain is tiny and compact, having only a relatively narrow range of computations to perform. Connected to it is a bank of four microphones. By blowing into these microphones in a code sequence, Avakian can type. For example, to type the letter "a" he blows into the third mike twice, then into the fourth twice. For "b" he blows once into the second mike, once into the fourth and twice into the second again. For "c" he blows twice into the second, once into the third, then once again into the second. And so on. Slow? Yes, it is, but not much slower than his speech and it makes him relatively independent of typists.

So far the electronic brain does only a computing job. Avakian thinks, however, that he if can organize and direct his brain to project two different kinds of waves he could dispense with the laborious code and communicate directly to a more efficient electronic brain to run the typewriter faster than normal fingers can do it.

He has other gadgets to help him. Under his desk is a row of buttons he can nudge with his knee to operate a tape recorder, a radio or television set, an electric razor or the room lights. He has a special tele-

(Continued on page 130)

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You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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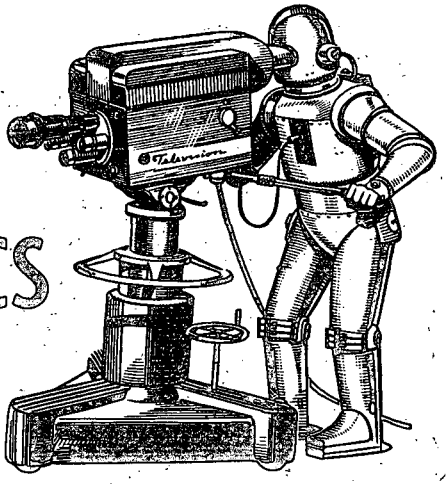
Science-Fiction Gimmicks

VIDEO-TECHNICS

by PAT JONES



CASTING DIRECTORS on other planets may have an easy time supplying an invisible actor or an animated sphere, but when a script for *Tales of Tomorrow* calls for such thespian talents, executive producer Mort Abrahams has to go the science-fiction writers one better. He's got to come up with a convincing facsimile of whatever the script writer has dreamed up.

You'd think it would be a simple matter to portray an invisible alien from outer space. But when the script required some animated antics from the unseen intruder, a new problem arose.

The other-worlder was supposed to be tied to a bed with ropes, and was to enhance the action by thrashing wildly around.

For this one the ropes were artfully wired to convey the impression of an irregular outline, and were manipulated like marionettes. To simulate the depression of an invisible weight resting solidly on the bed, the mattress was wired from the underside so that the bed could be worked to act up on cue.

The script of "The Quiet Lady," the video adaptation of Phyllis Sterling Smith's "The Quaker Lady and the Jelph" (TWS, August '52), required the histrionic talents of a small, sensate sphere. The globular visitor from space was to have a superior intelligence able to communicate with earthlings via knob-like antennae.

They solved that by zipping seven-year-old actor Glenn Walkin, freckles and all, into a canvas bag about the size of a beach ball decorated with a mottled green foam rubber exterior.

If classifying alien life forms seems a staggering problem of the future, think how the unions felt when they wanted to classify young Glenn. Was he prop, scenery, costume or actor? Well, the humanoids had it—he was an actor. He even got the sphere as a bonus and proceeded to scare the bejupiters out of all the neighborhood kids.

Have you ever wondered where they get the supermen who play on science-fiction tv? We hate to disillusion you, but it's the cameraman, who, by the use of trick camera angles conveys the illusion of disparate size. Once out of camera range, however, the actor is cut down to normal size, and the criticism or kudos of the director.

Personnel isn't the only hitch in science-fiction tv. One script required a "gravity nullifier." Mort solved this one by inverting the nozzle of a vacuum cleaner attachment out of camera range. When released from the actor's hand, the "gravity nullifier" hung suspended in the air current—no strings, no nothing.

"So far," says Mort, "we've never turned down a script because the casting problem or gimmick was too tough."

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It was pretty difficult to fall for a girl on a light gravity planet—but Jerry was perfectly willing to give it a try

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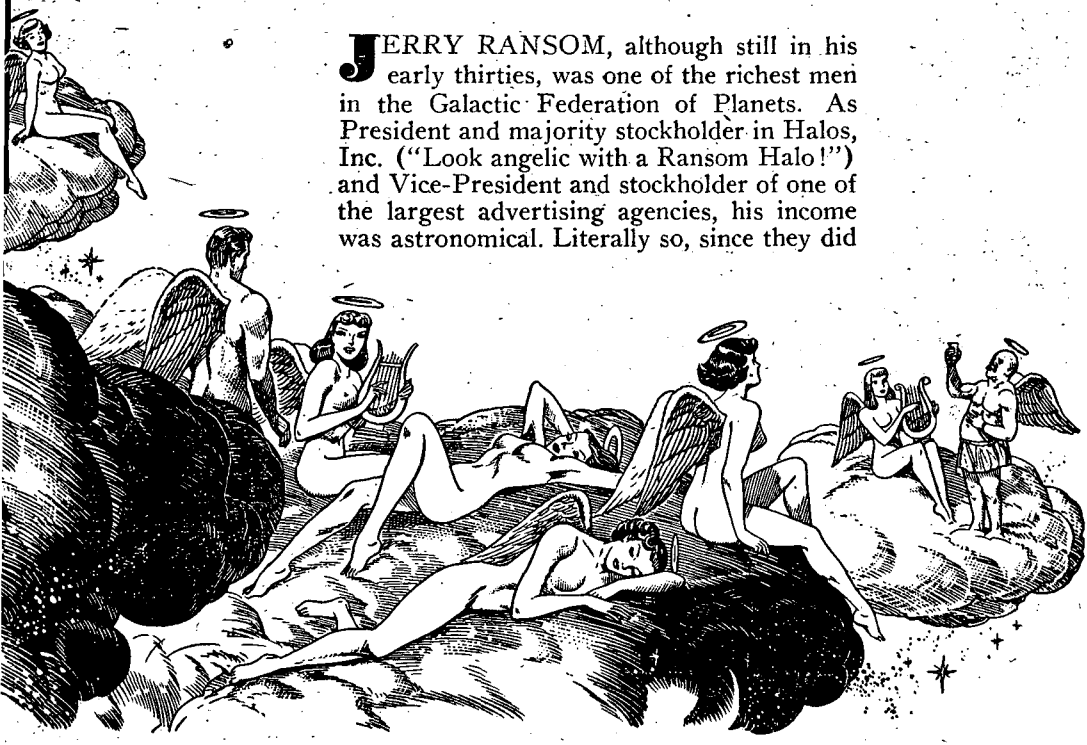
HALOS, INC.

A Novel by **KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN**

JERRY RANSOM, although still in his early thirties, was one of the richest men in the Galactic Federation of Planets. As President and majority stockholder in Halos, Inc. ("Look angelic with a Ransom Halo!") and Vice-President and stockholder of one of the largest advertising agencies, his income was astronomical. Literally so, since they did



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business with the thirteen star systems of the Federation and ten other star systems which were bound to the Federation through trade treaties. In spite of this, however, he did not waste his life in riotous living as did most of the wealthy space tycoons, but personally checked on almost every detail of his business.

As he did every week, Jerry Ransom showed up at the Galactic Video-Casting System for the rehearsal of the show sponsored by Halos, Inc. Theoretically, it was the job of his Antarean partner, Rru Photinus, to oversee their sponsored shows, but Jerry always sat in on rehearsals. The show was "Galactic Antics" starring Fibble Xe, the Funny Fomalhautan. Jerry sat in the control room with Rru Photinus, the producer, the director, a man from the advertising agency, a man from the network, three script girls, two stopwatch-holders, a censor and the two brothers-in-law of the vice president of the network. Although they could see the whole stage through the big glass window, they were watching the video screen. The scene was supposed to be a Spican village. Fibble Xe, dressed in the exaggerated style of a traveling jet salesman, was trying to impress a young Spican female with his wordliness.

"I took my first wife to Mars on our honeymoon," Fibble was saying. He waved his tentacles pompously. "And you know, when my wife got her first glimpse of Phobos, her face must have fallen ten miles."

"She was disappointed?" ventured the innocent Spican.

"No—she fell out of the air-lock." Fibble slapped a makeshift tentacle-wrist to a makeshift tentacle-thigh.

The producer, director and agency man laughed as heartily as if they'd never heard the joke before. The sound of their abandoned merriment was rudely interrupted by the harsh clearing of a throat. It was the censor. Everyone looked at him with apprehension.

"Mr. Ransom," the censor said gravely, "I'm very much afraid we'll have to do something about that joke."

"Too old?" Jerry asked, ignoring the startled glances this earned him. It was the kind of remark which might well have ruined him if he'd not been such an important man.

"Offensive," the censor said primly. "I mean the reference to his wife. After all, Mr. Ransom, the world is full of wives. Billions of them. Then, as you must know, this show is carried by our affiliates in the system of Alcyone where polygamy is compulsory. Ten wives to every husband. Ten buyers for every wage earner. The network can't afford to offend such a large audience even if Halos, Inc. thinks it can. The line will have to be changed."

"By Hill*, Chief, he's right," exclaimed the agency man. "I don't know how that slipped past us."

The director pressed a button on the talkback. "Just a minute, Fibble," he said wearily. He turned back to the others. "Maybe we could use the reducing gag. The one about the fat man who heard of a wonderful reducing salon on Deneb Kaitos. He went to it and was asked whether he wanted the slow or fast treatment. He picked the slow method and was taken into a huge empty room. Then a nude—"

"No," the censor said sharply. "I've already cut that one out of eight comedies, one drama, two lectures, and the poetry hour."

Rru Photinus sighed heavily. "I think," he said, "we can probably fix it. Why not make it a business trip instead of a honeymoon? He could have taken his partner to Mars to look at an investment. We might make the partner an Alnilamese. I understand that the Trade Commission has already announced that any trade treaty with Alnilam is impossible."

"I believe that would be acceptable," the censor admitted.

* A reference to an otherwise unidentified early deity of advertising.

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"Rru, old boy, you're a genius," exclaimed the agency man. "All right with you, chief?"

Jerry Ransom nodded.

The changes were quickly made and the rehearsal continued. The next two jokes went by unscathed and then they went into the commercial. This involved a number of beauties, representing every dominant life form in the universe, parading around in Ransom products while the announcer described how this lifted them above the common herd.

SHORTLY after starting Halos, Inc.,* Jerry Ransom had added a second product which was a perfect addition to

the artificial halos. Ransom Wings also came in assorted colors. They fitted by invisible means on the back of the wearer and the wing-tips reached almost to the ground. Like the halos, they were only decorative, but the fad had swept through the upper classes of the galaxy. No woman or man was considered in fashion unless she, or he, possessed at least a dozen halos and a dozen pair of wings. Power packs exhausted themselves and wings were soon damaged by cigarette burns or alcohol stain, so business continued to boom.

*The idea of the Ransom Halos was suggested by the fact that the dominant race on Antares have natural halos over their heads. The Antareans are related to the Terran classification Coleoptera, species Lampyridae, superfamily Diversicornia, and have certain luminous organs near their heads. The *Ransom Halos*, which come in all colors, are produced by a secret formula involving the use of a power pack. The power pack comes in a wafer-thin metal case.

The commercial was pitched in the proper subdued key to indicate that anyone who bought a halo and wings was practically good enough to grow his own.

The commercial over, Jerry Ransom left the control room. Rru Photinus followed him out into the corridor.

"You know, Jerry," he said, sighing heavily, "never in the history of Antares has anyone had ulcers, but I think I am about to be the first."

Jerry looked at his companion. The Antarean's body was about six feet long and he stood three feet high. He was wearing a snappy sport suit, cut in Terran style, and two pairs of suede shoes. At first glance he seemed to be a dashing figure, but Jerry noticed that his antennae were drooping and the outer edge of his green halo was slightly fuzzy.

"You are looking a little beat, Rru," Jerry said. "Why don't you knock off for a few months and take a vacation. You can afford it."

"I'm so rich I don't know what to do with the money," Rru admitted. "Sometimes I think that's one of the things wrong with me. While we Antareans have never known poverty, we are not accustomed to any one individual being able to own more than he can use. I'm afraid that it disturbs me."

"I know what you mean," Jerry said. "I started this whole thing more to pay off the Dibbles* than anything else. Since then I've wondered. One of the worst problems is having to associate with our customers. A more decadent bunch of characters I've never seen before . . . oh, well, take a vacation, Rru, and maybe you'll feel better. I've got to go back to the grind."

"Me, too," Rru said glumly as he turned back to the control room.

Jerry Ransom took an aircab across town to the Solar Building. Built only five years before, in 3042, it was the largest and finest office building in Nuyork. He stepped into an express and almost

*Cf. "Things of Distinction," Startling Stories, March, 1952.

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immediately was stepping out on the 200th floor. Everything there was in more or less perfect taste. The furniture was all of Martian *Ciba* wood and had been mandible-carved by the best artisans of the Alphecca System. The rugs were loomed from the chameleon-flax that grew on Miaplacidus II and they changed colors to complement whoever stepped upon them. This was the reception room of the Nojul, Ransom, Eeee, and Denning Advertising Agency (Formerly Denning, Dibble, Eeee, and Nojul).

The emphasis in the NoRED Agency was on a combination of decorum and boldness, which could be noticed the minute one stepped from the express. On the wall of the reception room there was a sign which boldly proclaimed:

NoRED
Albert Denning, Pres. & Treas. (Terra)
Jerry Ransom, V. Pres. & Sec. (Terra)
Lly Eeee, V. Pres. (Vega I)
Nojal Nojul, V. Pres. (Sirius III)
"Advertising means success and success means NoRED."

Decorum was achieved by printing the notice in Galactic Script letters and playing a soft light over it.

The arrangement of initials in the agency and the slogan had been changed with the coming of Jerry Ransom. Before that, it had been known as the DDE & No Agency, a fact which caused any number of bitter jokes from dissatisfied clients. The problem had seemed an insoluble one since the third vice president was from Sirius III where the first two letters of a name were considered the proper initial. But Jerry Ransom, when he replaced Dibble, suggested rearranging the letters so as to take advantage of a certain political maneuver which had held over for many centuries. Thereafter, the agency had been known as NoRED and that was the end of jokes about the name.

Jerry strode through the reception room and entered the door that led to the executive section of the floor. He stopped for only a moment at his own private office. In his absence, which was most of the time, it was more than ably run by his secretary. A young man who had always had an eye for beauty, Jerry was always mildly astonished to realize that he'd hired Kalli Malloon as his secretary. She was a tall girl, but it was impossible to tell how her length was proportioned. In an age when women's clothes were designed to exhibit their best points, Kalli still managed to wear voluminous skirts which reached almost to the floor, and rather bulky blouses which left everything to the imagination. Her reddish blonde hair was always pulled tightly into a knot on top of her head. She wore shell-rimmed glasses. She never wore cosmetics of any sort. But she *was* efficient.

WITHIN five minutes after he entered the office, she had given him a complete resumé of everything that had happened that morning and what she had done about it. As usual, she had handled everything as well as he could have.

"Is that all?" he asked when she'd finished.

"That's all," she said crisply. "Mr. Denning is now waiting in the conference room for you."

Jerry nodded. This he had expected. The agency business had increased after Jerry joined the firm and as a result Albert Denning, who was also Jerry's father-in-law, would make no decision without his aid.

He dictated a short memorandum to Rru Photinus to remind him to take a vacation, knowing the Rru was apt to do no more than talk about it, then went on down the hall to the conference room. His father-in-law and four of the agency's top men were seated around the huge table.

"Jerry," Albert Denning said with the heartiness that had marked his manner ever since the day he learned his son-in-law's credit rating, "we've been waiting for you."

"So I gathered," Jerry said dryly. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, my boy," Denning said. "Just a few little agency matters to discuss. By the way, how's Alice? I

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never see my little girl since you married her."

"I believe she's fine," Jerry said. "I don't see much of her myself. She usually seems to be busy with her club work. What are the matters we have to discuss?"

"Tell him, Sloane," the older man commanded.

"Right, chief," one of the other men said. He began to haul papers and graphs out of an oversize briefcase. "It's on that new account, the medical one. *Mayim*, the atomic medication. Guaranteed to cure practically anything even before you get it."

"*Mayim?*" Jerry said "Isn't that the quack medicine that's practically all water? I think I recommended that we turn down the account."

"Can't do that," Albert Denning said hastily. "Their advertising budget is too big. We have to be practical, my boy. Besides, all of us can't live in an atmosphere of halos and wings. We have to get down to solid earth." He paused to chuckle appreciatively and the four men followed suit. "Anyway, some of our leading scientists have recently claimed that the ancients were right in saying that we all need fluids with a high water content. And Sloane has worked out a campaign that should sell the medicine, yet is completely ethical."

"This I have to hear," Jerry muttered.

"Right," the chief copy man said. "Get a load of this, Mr. Ransom. Leading Federation scientists have stated that one of the most vital of life fluids is oxide of hydrogen. Laboratory tests have proved conclusively that life, either humanoid or non-humanoid, cannot exist without oxide of hydrogen. Now, you can get your daily requirements of oxide of hydrogen in *Mayim*, the new atomic wonder medicine. Drink *Mayim* every day and live!"

"Terrific," muttered the three men with him.

"Oxide of hydrogen?" said Jerry. "Isn't that just another way of saying water?"

"You see," Albert Denning said triumphantly. "Just like I said, it's ethical. Truthful advertising. That's the only kind that ever goes out of this agency. Tell the truth, my boy, don't you think that's a masterful piece of copy?"

Jerry sighed, but he knew that it would do no good to argue They would merely keep pounding at him until he weakened, or they'd change one word in the copy and pretend that they had taken care of his objections. So he merely nodded.

"It sounds a little watered down, but I guess it'll do," he said. This little witticism drew nothing but glares.

After that, they covered a number of routine matters. They discussed the copy for Pin-Back ("Are you afflicted with Ear-Wiggle?"); checked the slogan for Cruds ("Give Cruds to your mooching

Those Hucksters Again

EVERY man his own angel! Could a more appealing get-rich-quick scheme be devised than a little taste of a sort of Oriental Paradise of wine, women and song, complete with built-in halo to take away that guilty feeling? This was the charming temptation held out to those who had the price!

The hucksters of THINGS OF DISTINCTION with their campaign to sell hats to lightning bugs were pikers compared to the more sophisticated rascals of HALOS, INC. If you remember THINGS and the scurvy Dibble clan you'll be gratified to know they are still out for Jerry Ransom's blood—and bankroll.

—The Editor

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friends—the only cigarette with an atomic war-head").

When the last decision had been made, Jerry Ransom rose to leave.

"Thank you, my boy," Albert Denning said. He came around and put a paternal hand on Jerry's shoulder. "Why don't you and Alice come over and have dinner with an old man tonight?"

"Frankly, I'd rather do that than what I have to do," Jerry said. "But you know Alice. She likes to keep up with everything, so we have to take off tonight for a week-end on Ganymede. It's the Annual Halo Ball and since I started the damned thing, Alice and I are supposed to be the guests of honor."

"It's good for business, my boy," Denning said. "Besides, from what I hear, you can have yourself a time." He winked ponderously.

Jerry managed a grimace, which he hoped would pass for a smile, and left.

II

MUCH had happened to Jerry Ransom since he had started Halos, Inc. and catapulted himself into a fortune. Many of his ideas had undergone subtle modification. As an impecunious account executive, he had considered himself in love with Alice Denning, but he hadn't blinded himself to the practical side of wooing the daughter of the president of the advertising agency. He had taken for granted the necessity of keeping Alice entertained and had even been aware that he had triumphed over his rival, Eugene Dibble, primarily because he'd been more entertaining. But within a few weeks of his marriage to Alice he was a richer and more important man than his father-in-law and so the practical aspect had ceased to exist. He still believed himself to be in love with his wife, but whenever he mentioned it, she laughed at him. Love as an emotion was not fashionable that season. And Alice still needed to be entertained.

If the choice had been his, Jerry would never have gone to Ganymede. But Alice was determined to go and he knew that she'd go alone if he refused. Jerry had heard the usual stories about the place, and he knew that most of them were true, so he didn't relish the idea of Alice making a solo visit.

It was only shortly after the halo fad had started that a clever Terran promoter secured a long-term lease on Ganymede and converted it into a pleasure resort for the rich and idle. It was a sort of giant country club, with the only game the oldest one known to man. It was said that ninety per cent of the wealthy in the Federation belonged to the club and that the management was so discreet that it was possible for a husband and wife to arrive separately at Ganymede, spend the week end and leave without either one ever realizing the other had been there. So many and varied were the tales of Ganymedean orgies that it was said that the possibility of membership in the club was the biggest incentive of all to rising young capitalists.

There was already a large crowd there when Jerry Ransom anchored his space yacht a mile above the surface of Ganymede. Just below them floated one of the neon signs announcing the club.

GANYMEDE PLEASURE CLUB
Atmosphere Conditioned
Members Only

Jerry and Alice climbed into one of the club launches and were whisked down to a first level landing where the owner of the club and the Halo Ball Committee waited to greet them. Jerry was given a symbolic key to Ganymede and Alice was presented with Moon-orchids made up in the form of a halo and a pair of wings.

One of the features of the Ganymede Pleasure Club was that all visitors were provided with clouds. These were, of course, artificial, but they looked like the real thing and felt much as everyone had always imagined a cloud should feel if only solid enough to support one. The Club clouds did support guests. They were powered magnetically, with one central control, and they moved slowly about over the satellite. They were never

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more than ten feet from the ground, so that if a guest had imbibed too much and fell off he would suffer no serious damage. The various clouds kept their distance, although each one was equipped with a small audio-phone and if the occupants of two clouds wanted to get together, it could be arranged by both of them calling the central control.

There were always hundreds of smaller clouds, carrying an infinite assortment of foods, drinks and acceptable drugs, circulating around. Guided by the central control power, they went from cloud to cloud so that the guests could help themselves.

Each cloud was equipped with halo, wings and harps and it was a club rule that everyone must don his halo and wings immediately. The only other rule was that everyone was supposed to enjoy himself. Any lonely member finding himself alone on Ganymede could easily remedy the situation.

Since Jerry and Alice were the guests of honor, they were given a cloud of royal purple. For this occasion, their cloud was geared to travel somewhat faster than the others so that they could see the entire Ball.

JERRY and Alice stepped on the cloud and it floated away. Both of them took power packs and wings. Jerry grabbed at random from the several stacked at one end of the cloud, but Alice made sure that her halo and wings matched the purple cloud. They sat down on the cloud, sinking a few comfortable inches into its surface. The composition of clouds was a trade secret, but this one was the most comfortable thing Jerry Ransom had ever sat on.

Almost immediately a small cloud nudged up against the one they were on. It was loaded with the rare delicacies of the galaxy. Choice meats from Achernar and Vega; delicate cheeses from Aldebaran; giant eight-clawed lobsters from Rigil Kentaurus; the finest *snida*-herring from Capella; exotic vegetables from Altair, Pollux and Sirius; the rare fruits of Procyon; red, green, orange, blue and rich golden wines from Regelus, Alpheratz, Betelgeuse, Canopus and Spica; Martian whisky, Acruxian brandy, and the almost legendary fire-spirits of Alioth.

"Isn't this wonderful, darling?" Alice cried as she served herself from the small cloud.

"Wonderful," Jerry said dryly. He took a Martian whisky and tossed it off. Then he grabbed another to sip.

"Oh," she cried, looking off, "there's Alister Looce." She waved.

Jerry looked off to where a bright yellow cloud floated nearby. He squinted to get a better look at the two figures on the cloud.

"I don't think he saw you waving," he observed drily. "That isn't his wife with him—"

"Of course, darling," Alice said. "I think that's what's so stimulating about the club. You should relax more."

"By any chance," Jerry asked evenly, "are you hinting that you would prefer it if we were on different clouds?"

"Of course not," she said, sidestepping neatly. "Besides we're the guests of honor, so we must ride on the same cloud."

"I hope you don't find it too much of a strain."

Alice didn't answer. Jerry rolled over on his stomach, sipped his Martian whisky and glumly watched the revelers.

Although this was Jerry's first trip to the club since becoming a member—he had always before managed to see that he and Alice were busy when the big club dates came around—he realized that he recognized most of the occupants of the clouds they passed. Those who were conscious of their surroundings recognized them and waved back.

At various intervals they saw several differently-colored clouds which were marked with a single purple stripe running through the solid colors. This indicated that the clouds were occupied by important political personages.

He recognized, at one time or another, Rand Carsons, the Imperial President Galactic Federation of Planets, Commissioner Blandis of the Privy Cabinet, George George from the House of Com-

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moners, and Giussepe McTharcy from the House of Senility. In fact, there were probably no more than a dozen billionaires of the galaxy missing. And they might have been pariahs. After all—you have to draw the line somewhere, even among billionaires.

Even Thwai Thwee, the only billionaire in the Alpheratzan System, was there, floating along on a bilious green cloud. He and his three companions* were all smoking Alpheratzan *Li* pipes and looked as if they had advanced to the point where they no longer needed a cloud in order to float.

THE Annual Halo Ball lasted three days. By the time it was over, Jerry Ransom was disgusted and annoyed, and was suffering from a slight hangover from trying to drown his disgust in Martian whisky. Even the extracurricular parts of the ball had annoyed him. There had been something called a Joust between the Seraphim and the Cherubim in which humanoid midgets from Alphard, wearing tiny wings and riding on small clouds, had fought with wicked looking lances. There had also been an air polo match in which the players had tried, and usually succeeded, in killing each other. Jerry found the whole thing revolting, but Alice seemed to enjoy herself. What bothered Jerry particularly was that he suspected Alice would have enjoyed herself even more if he hadn't been along. Jerry suspected that at heart he was a little old-fashioned.

On the way back to Terra, he went forward and piloted the ship personally most of the way. The truth of the matter was that Jerry was more disturbed by the little outing than he dared admit to himself. He was always disturbed by the antics of those in his own social circle*, but it was more than that. The three-day ball had made him aware that he was more estranged from his wife than he had been at any time since he knew her. He responded to the awareness by trying to become so busy he couldn't think about it.

They arrived home on Terra on the first morning of a new week. Alice Ransom had a committee meeting, to plan a benefit for the war orphans of Rigel, so she gave her husband a wifely peck on the cheek and ran off to her own wing of the house. Jerry took a shower, used the Glo-Shav, changed clothes and departed for the office.

As early as he was, Kalli Malloon was also in the office, being her usual efficient self. Jerry looked at her curiously. He remembered the days when he'd been working his way up in the agency and he seemed to recall that practically no one, including himself, ever got in any earlier than they had to.

"Miss Malloon," he said, "aren't you ever late to work?"

"No, sir," she said.

"Why?" he asked. He hesitated, aware of her unattractiveness and wondering if she were sensitive about it. "Don't you have any private life away from here?" he asked finally.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I read a lot."

"Facsimile broadcasts, that sort of thing?"

"Oh, no. Books."

He looked at her in amazement. "Books. I thought no one still read them except professors, librarians and a few crackpots like myself."

"I was sure that you read books, too,

* The club rule that a member could never bring more than one non-member with him at a time had been waived for Thwai Thwee at the time he joined. This was, as all but the most sheltered persons know, due to the fact that Alpheratzans have four sexes and there just isn't any point in two or even three Alpheratzans getting together for anything except business. Just what happens when four Alpheratzans of different sexes get together is still a bit of a mystery despite the fact that there have been a number of books written on the subject. Perhaps the best job was by a Terran physicist who described Alpheratzan mating as being comparable to an atomic chain reaction.

* Jerry Ransom and his father-in-law were exceptions in the 31st Century. The majority of the industrialists were absentee owners, their businesses being run by trusted employees while they collected their profits and went from one playworld to another. The Solarian Political Party had been in power for more than two hundred years, with Imperial President Rand Carsons having already held that office for more than twenty years. There were three or four other small political parties but their attempts to win offices were only token gestures. Although the galaxy was essentially prosperous, there had been a number of social philosophers who had likened the century to the times of the ancient Roman, Great Britain, and American empires, but they had been dismissed as "melancholy intellectuals."

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Mr. Ransom," she said. If her voice held something more than the accepted respect of a secretary for her employer, Jerry didn't notice it.

"Well, we must read a book together sometime," he said lightly, not meaning it. "I don't suppose anything has come up this early in the morning, has it?"

"I'm afraid something has," she said. "Mr. Denning is in and says he'd like to see you as soon as you came in."

"Denning in?" Jerry repeated in astonishment. "Don't tell me the Galactic Synod has declared advertising illegal? I can't think of anything else that would bring the old boy out so early."

"Mr. Denning didn't confide in me," she said primly. "I imagine he's waiting for you in his office."

Curiosity more than anything else prompted Jerry Ransom to hurry to the office of his father-in-law. He entered to find the older man seated at his desk, glaring at something on it. He glanced up and seemed to find some satisfaction in Jerry's appearance.

"Trouble, my boy," he said. "Somebody is attacking us, trying to ruin us."

Jerry, well aware that his father-in-law saw ruin in every passing wind, grinned. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Someone trying to take an account away from us?"

"Worse," the old man growled. "Just take a look at this. It's a copy of a leaflet which apparently has been widely distributed through the galaxy. The story of it was carried on a facsimile newscast yesterday and they reproduced the leaflet. Which means that millions more saw it because of that. Look at it." He tossed a shiny facsimile sheet across the desk.

Jerry picked it up and looked at it.

THE ANTI-TERRAIST IS UPON US

In the old days of Terra, before wicked and evil men came among us, there was a great belief among the peoples of mankind. It was a belief which strove to drive the evil from man and in its goodness offered salvation and eternal life not only for all mankind but for all sentient beings of the universe. This was the proud heritage of Terra which should have been carried to the star systems of the galaxy. But, as it was written by the prophets of old, there came upon us an evil and mankind forgot the bright future that had been promised him in the world of paradise. And as it was also predicted, out of the great evil that has befallen us there has appeared an even greater evil, that which was prophesied would come as the Anti-Terraist. He is upon us.

There is today in our midst a group which calls itself Halo, Inc. and it dresses a small company of men and women in halos and wings—yes, even in those things which were promised to men for virtue. But the men and women who wear these are sinners, bringing shame and damnation upon you, desecrating the finest beliefs of your forefathers—and robbing non-humans of that which was promised to all who possessed a soul. There can be nothing but pain and misery and eternal suffering for you as long as this is permitted.

The idea of men in wings and with the light of the eternal shining over their heads is one which only the good deserve and which must be held in the keeping of those who represent you before the authority which is higher than mankind.

The idea of men in wings and with the light of the eternal shining over their heads is one which only the good deserve and which must be held in the keeping of those who represent you before the authority which is higher than mankind.

Rise up and destroy the evil which defiles the tokens of man's goodness. In the name of the Voice, the Mover and the Holy Sphere.

—*The Order of Holy Terra*

WHEN he'd finished reading it, Jerry tossed the sheet back on the desk. "The work of some crackpot," he said. "You can tell by reading it that it was written by someone who has read a little — but a very little — about the old religions on Terra, and is trying to arouse the same sort of feeling. In fact, he's making a travesty of something our ancestors used to take pretty seriously. But he's missed most of the old points and doesn't have most of his facts straight. As I understand it these old beliefs were mostly based on faith — and nobody has much of that any more. There never was such a thing as the Holy Sphere in the old religions, nor was there ever a Voice or Mover. This stuff is sheer nonsense."

"I might agree with you," Albert Denning said glumly, "except for a cou-

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ple of things. As you know, taxes throughout the galaxy have been pretty high and general prices have been controlled at top levels. There have been rumors that there is considerable dissatisfaction. If the commoners of the galaxy had a rallying point, such as any sort of a religious revival, no telling what might happen. My second reason is that the first reason has apparently occurred to others. We've been asked to be in the office of the Imperial President tomorrow morning."

"Because of this?" Jerry asked, indicating the leaflet.

"They didn't say, but it must be. They asked for the major stockholders of Nojul, Ransom, Eeee and Denning and of Halos, Inc."

"That means Rru and Alice will have to go, too." A large part of Jerry's stock was in Alice's name. "We'd better tell the boys to rough up a campaign to answer the leaflet. We can take the stand that by getting people to wear halos and wings, we're reminding them of the better part of their history. Who do you think is back of this?"

"I have no idea," Albert Denning said. "I've tried to reach someone in the government, but I guess it's too early. I'll get the copy department busy on the roughs. That's a good idea, my boy."

Jerry Ransom went back to his office. During the day, he and Denning both tried to reach someone in the government but neither of them had any luck. There was only one conclusion to be drawn. They were going to be told nothing before they arrived for the appointment. Jerry notified Rru and tried several times to reach his wife, but he was unable to locate her. He told his secretary what papers would be needed, and that she would go with them.

He went home early that evening, but Alice still wasn't there. He had dinner alone and waited. It was almost midnight before Alice finally came home.

"I hope," he said, "that you have no committee meetings for tomorrow. We have to go to New Terra City on Rigil Kentaurus."

"I know," she said, nodding. She seemed excited.

He looked at her in astonishment. "How do you know? Did you talk to your father?"

She shook her head. "Everyone is talking about the Order of Holy Terra and the fact that you've been called to New Terra City."

He didn't like that. If anyone was talking about it somebody must have started the talking and was stirring it up. But he said nothing of this to her. He went over to her and slipped an arm around her shoulders.

"Don't worry, darling," he said. "We'll lick them — whoever they are."

"Don't be silly, darling," she said. She twisted out of his arm and went to look at herself in the mirror. "Just think, we may be on the verge of a great revival of religion that will sweep everything before it. I thing it's exciting.

III

JERRY and Alice, accompanied by his secretary, landed at the New Terra City spaceport early the following morning. They took an aircab to the Presidential Palace, perched on the very edge of the artificial Synod Sea. The sight of New Terra City and the Presidential Palace was one which never failed to thrill Jerry Ransom. It was still one of the beauty spots of the galaxy.*

They were shown into the Imperial offices at once. Albert Denning, Rru Photinus, Lly Eeee, and Nojal Nojul — the latter in his special tank that permit-

* When the Galactic Federation of Planets was first formed in 2472, it was decided to give the government its own planet. The one habitable planet in Rigil Kentaurus was chosen, partly because there was no intelligent life there, so that no one had to be displaced. The entire planet was landscaped, including the building of artificial lakes and the one great sea. New Terra City was built, covering a quarter of the planet. Everything was designed with an eye to permanent beauty. The architecture was Ancient Modern, but the buildings were still pleasing to the modern eye. The entire government of the Federation was housed in New Terra City. There was another, smaller city on the opposite side of the planet for the caretakers and domestic workers. Near this second city lived the fishermen who supplied the famous lobsters from Synod Sea, and the other workers who supplied food for New Terra City. Near New Terra there was a permanent detachment of the Space Patrol, charged with the protection of the planet.

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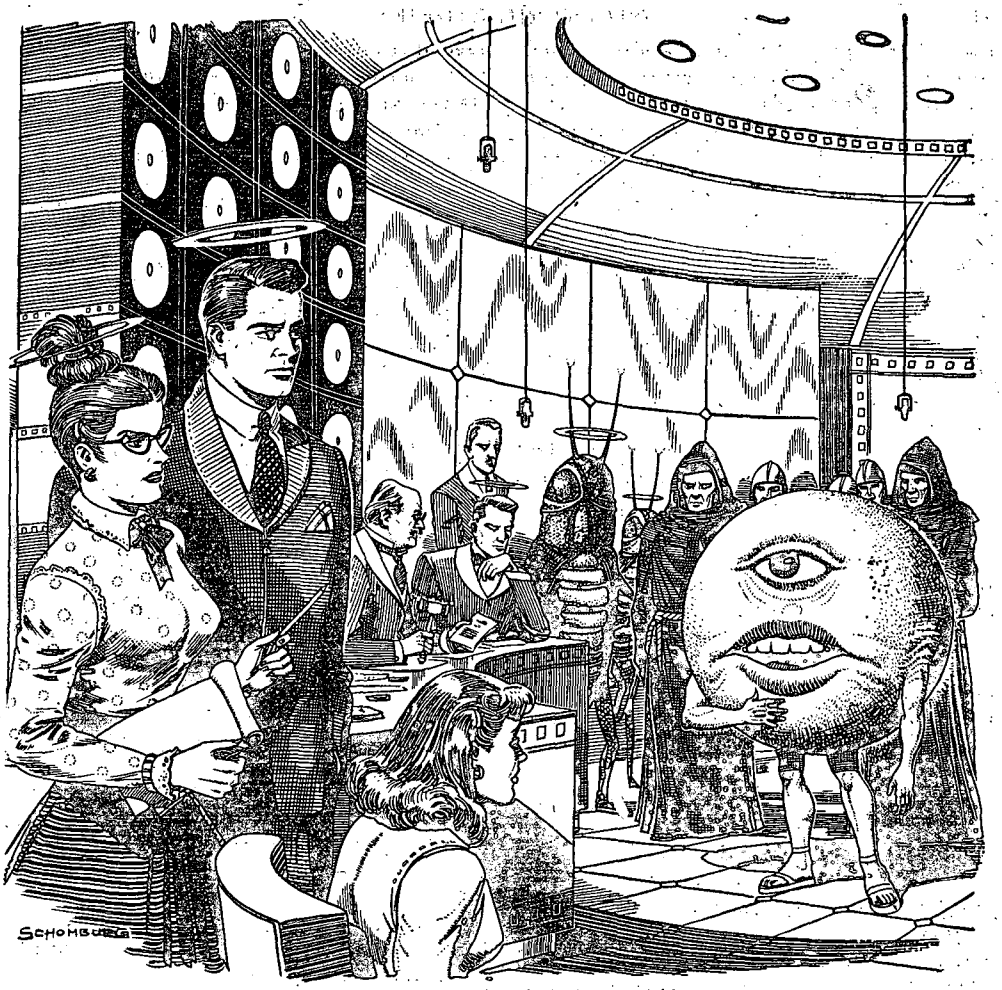

One eye viewed the room briefly before vanishing. . . .

ted him to visit Terra-like atmospheres — were already there with the Imperial President.

Imperial President Rand Carsons was, of course, a Terran. Since the beginning of the Federation, the Terrans had dominated the government and had seen to it that the other systems never had more than a token representation in the two houses and the Privy Cabinet. The president was now a man of seventy or eighty, although he looked much younger. His face was usually set in the benevolent expression well known over the galaxy, but a closer look revealed the ruthless purpose beneath the schooled features.

Immediately upon entering, Jerry Ransom felt certain that some conversation had already been held without waiting for him. It seemed to him that his father-in-law was reluctant to look at him. Eeee and Nojul both nodded to him, but their faces had the expression of a man who is looking at his old spaceship and wondering how much he'll get on a trade-in. And Rru Photinus was angry. It would not have been noticeable to anyone not familiar with Antareans, but Jerry saw that his halo was a darker green than usual.

"Sir President," Rru said as soon as the Imperial President had greeted Jerry

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and Alice, "I should like to request a few moments to speak alone with Mr. Ransom."

The Imperial President flashed his usual hearty smile. "Now, now, Mr. Photinus," he said, "we're all friends here and there's no need for secrets. Besides, my duties make me a very busy man and I'm afraid I can't spare the time for you and Mr. Ransom to go into a separate conference. You understand how it is, Mr. Ransom?" His tone indicated that he and Jerry were humans and therefore could naturally understand more than Rru Photinus.

"I have no doubt," Jerry said dryly, "that I will understand before I leave here."

"Exactly," said the Imperial President, smiling again. "This is a very serious matter before us, Mr. Ransom. Most serious."

"I suppose you're referring to the Order of Holy Terra?"

"Exactly, Mr. Ransom.

"I think it's a lot of nonsense," Jerry said firmly. "The whole thing sounds like the work of a crackpot. I'm surprised that the government takes it seriously. Why not just send the Space Patrol out after the author or authors of the leaflet?"

"I'm afraid it isn't that simple, Mr. Ransom," the Imperial President said. "Unfortunately, there is a great deal of restlessness in the galaxy today. We have our share of troublemakers. I'm afraid that many of the citizens of the Federation have long been resentful of such social functions as our recent Halo Ball — at which I believe I saw you and your charming wife."

"What I think you mean," Jerry said evenly, "is that the average citizen sees that the majority of the wealth is owned by a very few who spend that wealth in drunken orgies while the rest of the galaxy works like hell just to exist. And, I think you're saying, if they get restless about this, they're liable to get mad enough to throw all of you out on your over-stuffed derrières."

"Crudely put, but essentially correct," the President said. "But don't forget, Mr. Ransom, that you are also one of the few who own most of the wealth."

"True, but since I don't act the same —"

"Oh, we all think we're different," the president interrupted. "And in a way we are. However, the situation doesn't have to be serious. It's true that this Order of Holy Terra has aroused some religious interest which in turn has served to focus the restlessness of the masses, but I believe the matter can be handled with a minimum of suffering."

"You mean you'll crush this silly Order right away?" Jerry asked. "If that's what you mean, you can be sure that we will give you any assistance we can. That assistance, I might add, will not be inconsiderable."

THE Imperial President put the tips of his fingers together and smiled up at the ceiling. "Mr. Ransom, do you know how long it is since we've had any religious orders in the Federation?"

"At least three hundred years, but—"

"Three hundred and five years ago," the Imperial President said. He sounded as if he were making a speech. "We stamped out the last vestiges of the old religions. It was a struggle, but we finally stamped them out. Within a century most people had forgotten about them. But now people have eagerly reacted to this new religion, although it bears little relation to the older ones. In fact its a pretty garbled pseudo religion. You know, I think we made a mistake in doing away with religion."

Jerry Ransom could only stare at him in amazement.

"It is the least we can do for the masses," the President continued. "It gives them that little extra something, so that they won't mind what the rest of us do. No, Mr. Ransom, I'm inclined to think that the Order of Holy Terra is a good thing. And I believe that we can do business with them."

A horrible suspicion crept into Jerry's mind. "You've already talked with them?" he said

The head of Federation nodded.

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"Preliminary talks only," he said. "With the three heads of the Order. The Voice, the Mover, and the Holy Sphere. Very reasonable individuals."

"What do they want?" Jerry asked harshly.

"I believe, Mr. Ransom, that they consider you and your work with Halos, Inc., as the greatest force for evil in the galaxy. You understand, however, there is nothing personal in this attitude. They have no objections to the halos and wings being manufactured and sold, but believe that such control and sales should be in the hands of the Order so that the wearing of halos and wings does not become a mockery. I am inclined to believe that their position is not unreasonable."

"What do they want?" Jerry asked again.

"They are quite willing," the Imperial President continued amiably, "for minor stockholders and employees to continue in Halo, Inc., providing they join the Order. They have no desire to interfere with your partners in the advertising agency. They ask only that you turn Halos, Inc. and your interest in the advertising agency over to them and that you refrain from engaging in any related business anywhere within the galaxy."

"They expect to pay for my business?"

"Oh, no! The transaction must be looked at in a spiritual light. It is not to be contaminated by the exchange of credits."

"I won't do it," Jerry said.

"In the event that their request is not granted, they have intimated that they might start a revolution which would overthrow the government and the entire wealthy class. There is a strong possibility that they could do this. I understand that many members of the Space Patrol already belong to the Order. In the meantime, Mr. Ransom, I'd like you to meet the three leaders of the Order." He leaned forward and pressed a button on his desk.

The door opened and one of the Imperial Secretaries came in.

"Please ask the Voice, the Mover and the Holy Sphere to step in," the President said.

The secretary withdrew and they waited in silence. In a moment, the door opened again. The first individual to enter was a Merakian. His body was an almost perfect sphere, completely smooth and unmarred by so much as even a wrinkle. He strode into the room on two very humanoid legs, but these were the only additions to the sphere. Merakians, however, have psycho-adaptable flesh and even as he entered he suddenly developed two humanoid arms. The front of the sphere rippled and a mouth appeared. It was fixed in a broad smile. One eye appeared above it and viewed the room briefly before vanishing.

"The Holy Sphere," the Imperial President announced.

BEHIND the Merakian strode the two Terrans. They were both dressed in luminescent blue robes which fell to the floor. Thick brown cords were tied around their middles. There were cowls on the robes and these were pulled over their heads. Their faces were partly in the shadow, but even through the would-be disguise, Jerry Ransom could see enough to make him doubt his eyes. But the words of the Imperial President confirmed what he saw.

"Voice Erwin Dibble and Mover Eugene Dibble," he said.

"I should have guessed something like this," Jerry Ransom said. "What kind of racket is this? You two characters should now be a little more than halfway to exile in Andromeda."

"*Pax vobiscum*," Erwin Dibble said in an unctuous voice. "During the first year of the trip away from Terra, we had nothing to do but meditate and it was during this period of silent communion that the Truth came to us. Both Eugene and myself swore that if we could return to the Federation we would devote our lives to spreading the Truth and we prayed for a miracle which would deliver us. A year and a half from Terra our prayers were answered. The miracle came in the form of he who is now

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the Holy Sphere. At that time, he was a space pirate, but we converted him to the One Truth and persuaded him to join us in our great crusade for the new religious Order."

"Comet dust," snorted Jerry. "He's still a space pirate and so are you."

"We expected such an answer from you," said Erwin Dibble. "It merely shows the evil that lurks within you. We have come, in the name of Holy Terra, only in time to save the galaxy from impending chaos."

"To line your pockets, you mean," Jerry corrected. "Well, you won't get away with it."

"Brother Carsons," Erwin Dibble said.

"I'm afraid they can," the Imperial President said. "In fact, just before you came in, the first part of their demand was settled. I'm referring to the severance of your connection with the advertising agency."

Jerry Ransom looked at his father-in-law, but the latter refused to meet the gaze. "You know how it is my boy," he said. "The agency is bigger than any one man and my first consideration had to be for the agency."

"Sure," Jerry said drily. "What excuse are you using for this little piracy? After all, I am an owner and we have a contract."

"Morals clause," Albert Denning said blandly. "The Imperial President assures me that the courts will uphold my action."

"He ought to know," Jerry said.

The Imperial President smiled. He leaned forward and pressed another button on his desk. This one was answered by a man wearing the uniform of a Marshal in the Space Patrol. The President scribbled something on a sheet of paper on his desk and handed it over to the officer.

"Marshal," he said, "this is an order for the confiscation of a Federation corporation known as Halos, Inc. You will immediately take possession of the corporation and all of its assets in the name of the Galactic Federation of Planets."

The Marshal saluted and left.

JERRY RANSOM glanced at the two Dibbles. The expression on Erwin Dibble's face was dangerously close to a smirk. Eugene Dibble's expression was more obvious.

"The other stockholders," the Imperial President said, will find their interests untouched when we turn Mr. Ransom's interest over to the Order of Holy Terra."

"As much as I hate to enrich them further," Rru Photinus said stiffly, "I refuse to accept my shares back unless Mr. Ransom's are returned." He stood up, his halo so dark it was almost black.

"Thank you, Rru," Jerry said quietly, "but it isn't necessary."

"It's just as well this way," the President said coldly. "I very much doubt if Mr. Photinus would have been comfortable in the Order. I imagine it is even doubtful if one could claim Antareans have souls. Well, Mr. Ransom, it begins to look as if they could do it, eh?"

"With your help," Jerry said. "Now, we shall see if they can keep it — even with your help. Good day — brethren. Alice, are you ready?"

There was a moment of silence. "Really, Jerry," Alice Ransom said, "you can't expect me to go out in complete poverty—to just tag along after you like a — a camp follower."

"Meaning you're going to stay and join the Order?

"I might," she said lightly. "Eugene — I mean the Friar was explaining the Order to me last night and I think it sounds just too fascinating for words."

Jerry Ransom stared at his wife, and was surprised to find that his only emotion was one of relief. Even the news that she had seen Eugene Dibble the night before and must have known all about this in advance failed to disturb him in the slightest.

"What are you going to be in the new Order?" he asked. "The Mother Inferior?"

"That'll be enough of that," Eugene Dibble said sharply. "You are speaking of the woman I intend to marry in the eyes of the Universe and the Order."

Jerry grinned. "I was just thinking,"

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he said, "that this will be a better revenge on you than shipping you off to Andromeda." He stood up and turned to face his wife. "Alice, would you like a divorce?"

"I think that might be best," Alice said coolly. "Will you arrange the evidence, darling?"

Jerry looked around the room and his gaze fell on his secretary, who had been standing silently through everything.

"Since it's already been ruled that the intent to commit adultery is enough, I'll give you the evidence right now," he said. He reached over, pulled his secretary into his arms and kissed her. He was so preoccupied that he failed to notice that her lips were considerably warmer and more eager than could be expected even from so efficient a secretary.

"After what has happened today," he said when he finally released the girl, "I have no doubt you can build this into quite a thing. The Imperial President should be especially good at it. Come on, Rru, Miss Malloon." He marched out of the Imperial office with his secretary and Rru Photinus following.

It was only after an aircab deposited them at the spaceport that Jerry Ransom thought of one aspect of what had just happened.

"Miss Malloon," he said, "I'm sorry that I involved you in that mess. I'm afraid it didn't occur to me that I was putting you in such an awkward position."

"I don't mind," she said. If her face got a little pinker at the thought of what had happened no one noticed it.

"Also there was no reason for my dragging you out of there. You probably could have stayed on as an employee —"

"No, thanks," she said crisply. "My loyalties are with you, Mr. Ransom. Even if you can't afford to pay me, it will be all right."

"Good girl," Jerry said. He chuckled. "But I don't think I'm quite broke yet, so you're still getting a salary. Let's go."

"Where?" asked Rru Photinus. Only now was his halo beginning to resume its normal shade.

"Back to Terra. To Nuyork. If the Dibbles have the Imperial President in their pocket it won't be long before they start feeling their muscles. We'd better look after our bank accounts, and I've still got McFinister Hats.*"

They got in the space yacht and took off. Landing in Nuyork, the three of them went at once to the Jupiter Building and up to the offices of McFinister Hats, Inc. But there was an unpleasant surprise waiting for them. A Space Patrolman stood in front of the door.

"This office temporarily closed," he told them curtly, "upon the orders of the Imperial President of the Galactic Federation of Planets."

"Why?" Jerry asked, although he'd already guessed that this must have been included in the order the President had signed.

The patrolman turned and glanced at the sealed notice on the door. "Property of a J. Ransom," he said. "His property is being confiscated by the state. That's all I know, bud. Move along."

From there they went to the Galactic National Bank. Jerry's account had also been attached, but Rru's had not. They arranged for his credits to be transferred to Antares.

"One good thing," Jerry said as they hurried back to the spaceport. "Antares still isn't a part of the Federation, so probably the outlets of the Posterior Protectory are still free. And the space

* Jerry Ransom originally went to Antares to find out why no one there bought McFinister hats ("If you wear a McFinister hat, you have to get ahead!"). He discovered, of course, that Antareans wouldn't wear hats because of their natural halos. Because he did not quickly find a way around this impediment, the Dibbles had had him fired from the agency. Then Jerry had accidentally discovered that no matter how warmly Antareans dressed they suffered from cold weather. This was because they breathed through pores in their abdomens and didn't dare cover that part of their bodies. Jerry Ransom got the idea of selling the Antareans McFinister emergency spacehelmets, made of chemically-treated soft cloth which came in a variety of colors, thus enabling them to keep warm without smothering. Jerry Ransom, Rru Photinus and another Antarean, Xxe Bomeri, got the exclusive McFinister agency rights for the seven planets in the Antarean system. The Ransom, Photinus & Bomeri Posterior Protectory had been the beginning of his fortune. Later, Jerry had bought McFinister out.

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yacht—I hope."

It was. There was no sign of the Space Patrol around the sleek yacht and there was no protest when he checked with the control office for a flight approval. Within minutes the three of them were in the space yacht and flashing toward Antares.

IV

THE Posterior Protectory stores on the Antarean planets were still flourishing and there was no sign that they were threatening. Since his share of the income was still enough to make him a rich man, Jerry Ransom was considerably relieved. Although trade agreements between Antares and the Federation had been in existence for about three years there were as yet hardly any Terrans on the Antarean planets. To some degree this was due to the fact that there was still a lot of species prejudice in the Federation and there was an inclination to speak of the Antareans as "bugs." But Jerry Ransom had learned to like the Antareans and he enjoyed being there. He was glad to notice that Kalli Malloon also seemed to adapt to the Antarean world, although he was a long way from guessing the real reason for her contentment.

By the time they had reached Antares, Jerry's first burst of anger had slackened off. He was still determined to strike back, but he realized that he'd better move slowly. The fact that the Imperial President was on the side of the Dibbles—whether through actual fear of a religion-led revolution or because he was sharing in the take—made it practically the same as bucking the political power of the entire Federation. Before he could do anything, he'd have to find out what the Dibbles would do next.

A number of Antareans, mostly relatives of Rru Photinus, were drafted as spies. They were sent to various parts of the Federation on trade missions and their reports soon started coming in. Their reports were in the native language of the Antareans, so there was little danger of any human being aware of what was in them. On arrival they were translated by Rru and turned over to Kalli Malloon. Each evening she and Jerry went over them.

The government had kept Jerry's bank account and McFinister Hats, but Halos, Inc. had been turned over to the Order of Holy Terra and the advertising agency was once more known as Denning, Dibble, Eeee and Nojul. Actually, under the surface, nothing had changed. The wealthy playboys and playgirls of the galaxy had rushed to the new religion. They wore long monkish robes and they still wore the halos and wings. The Pleasure Club on Ganymede had been changed to the Retreat of Holy Terra and a huge monastery was being built on the satellite. The Imperial President had been made Honorary Voice of the order and lesser government officials were Honorary Movers.

But the cost of halos and wings was still prohibitive to Commoners. More important, they still carried on exactly as they had before, only the trappings of their orgies had changed. According to the reports, the Order was merely a newer and bigger thrill to the heavy spenders. It was said that the monastery on Ganymede would have bare "study" cells and great stone dungeons and a torture room for those interested in mortification of the flesh.

IN THE meantime the revamped DDE & No Advertising agency was busily using all of its resources in behalf of the new movement. Theoretically every individual who was a citizen of the Federation, humanoid or non-humanoid, could become a member of the Order, but this was true only in theory. It wasn't publicized, but everyone who did join paid ten thousand credits for the privilege. The ordinary citizens were told that they had to prepare themselves before they could be admitted to the inner circles of the Truth. They were, however, permitted to join something called Amateurs of the Order of Holy Terra for the small sum of one credit per head. Amateurs were not allowed to wear

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halos and wings, even if they could afford them, but they could wear robes providing they bought them from the Order at five credits each. The last report estimated that at least four billion individuals had become Novitiates.

"Four billion," exploded Kalli Malloon when she read it. "That means they've taken in four billion credits in less than a month, plus whatever they've made from the sale of the robes, plus the fees in the Order itself, plus the halos and wings they've sold. No wonder the Imperial President wanted to help them."

"It's a pretty profitable operation," Jerry admitted, "but I doubt if the Dibbles are sharing much of that wealth with anyone. There's another reason why they've got the President in their pocket. Everyone of those Amateurs is a voter. At the rate they're going, they'll control the whole political setup."

One of the reports also gave details on the advertising campaign which was being carried on over videocast, facsimile and even in small bulletins being given out by the billions. The orgies of the Order on Ganymede were already being described as "fertility rites" and connected to the welfare of the universe through suggestion. Stress was put on the fact that only those who had already discovered Truth were capable of carrying out these rites. Amateurs were urged to devote themselves to the teachings of the Order, and to lead lives devoid of luxuries, in order that they might some day take part in the rites.

Jerry Ransom had wondered what the role of the Merakian, the Holy Sphere, was to be, but one of the reports explained that.* It told how the Merakian had died, how his body had lain in state, and then how he had returned to the living seven days later. The publicity in connection with this indicated that this was a feat possible for anyone who had attained the degree of Truth enjoyed by the Holy Sphere.

"Oh, damn," Kalli said. "Fertility rites and reincarnation! They're taking us back thousands of years. They've borrowed a little something from practically every religion known in the history of Terra. They've taken one or two things from each and jumbled them all together into their own infernal brew. If they're allowed to get away with this little racket, they'll milk the galaxy dry and put practically everyone back into slavery."

"I know," Jerry said thoughtfully. "You know, I started getting these reports with the idea of getting back my own and tying a rocket to the tails of the Dibbles. But I'm beginning to think that they're a menace and something should be done about them for the good of the universe."

"Oh, Jerry, I'm so glad," Kalli said. Then she blushed as she realized she'd called him by his first name. When she saw that apparently he had not noticed, she hurried on before it could dawn on him. "Things like this have always appealed to people when they had the least freedom. That's why it's so successful. It's the hardest thing to fight."

JERRY nodded. In the time that they'd been on Antares, he had worked more closely with his secretary than he ever had before. As a result, he'd come to know her much better. He still thought of her as one of the least attractive women he'd ever seen, but he'd come to have a lot of respect for her intelligence. Several times he'd thought of suggesting that she do something about dressing better, but the thought that she probably had a bad figure had deterred him. Fashionable clothes might only make her look worse.

"There are only two ways to fight them," she said, and for the moment her tone was that of an equal rather than a secretary addressing her employer. "You'll either have to start another religious order and try to prove that yours

* Merakian biology has long baffled the leading scientists of other star systems. The average life span of a Merakian is four hundred years; but if a Merakian is exposed to some sudden shock to his nervous system he goes into a trance. There is no known way to tell this trance from real death, but after seven days the spark of life returns and the Merakian's life has been prolonged an extra hundred years. The limit of such "returns from death" is fifteen. Barring fatal accidents, the Merakian will die exactly four hundred years after his fifteenth "death" from shock. For a more complete sociological study of this phenomenon, c.f. The Merakian Miracle, Thrilling Wonder Stories, October, 1951.

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is the only true religion, or you'll have to find some way of getting into the Order of Holy Terra and gaining control of it. Either way, I have a suggestion to make."

Jerry had already arrived at the same conclusion himself, so he nodded. "Go ahead," he said.

"Some of the old religions," she said, "contained what were really sound rules for ethics and morality once the superstitions and rituals were stripped from them. They were basically a way of life. The Dibbles just grabbed a few surface things at random. If you were to go through the old books and pick out the sound ideas, it might give you a better chance."

"You're probably right," he said. "Okay, send off to the Museum of Ancient Terra and have them run off facsimiles for us. Wait a minute. Better not send for them in my name. We don't know whether they're checking up on me or not. Ask Rru to make a suggestion."

The following day a request went off to the museum, in the name of a major Antarean university, for copies of *the* book of every leading religion on Terra in the old days. The next space liner passing over Antares robot-dropped a case of facsimile books. They included the Old and New Testaments, the Koran, and the teachings of Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tze, Sigmund Freud, Adam Smith and Karl Marx.

After the books arrived there were long sessions at the house which Jerry Ransom had rented in Lunota, the chief city on Antares I. Jerry, Kalli Malloon and Rru Photinus read them all, discussing each book as soon as they'd all three read it. Despite this, they had gotten no nearer concrete plans for their next step. Then the decision was taken out of their hands.

They had been on Antares I a little more than a month. They had finally finished reading all of the books. That morning they had met in Jerry's house to discuss it. Rru was in favor of basing any attempt at a rival religion on the writings of Freud; as the father of ten children and innumerable larvae, he liked the idea of blaming everything on sex. Jerry and Kalli had yet to express their own ideas when the front door chimes sounded. At the same time the video screen on the wall lit up, showing a Space Patrolman.

"Well," Jerry said dryly, "it looks as though our friends haven't forgotten us after all."

"Quick," Rru said. "We can go out the back way. If we can make it up to the old city, they will never be able to find us*"

Jerry shook his head reluctantly. "No, Rru," he said. "It might work for a while, but eventually they'd find us. They have locaters that would point us out even if we were invisible. And then they'd be sure to take some sort of revenge on your people. They can't have anything very serious against us. Let's get it over with."

HE LED the way to the door and threw it open. Standing outside was the Space Patrolman they'd already seen on the screen. With him was another Terran, dressed in a luminescent blue robe, and an Antarean. That the latter was very unhappy about his own presence was obvious in the fuzziness of his halo. He muttered something in his own language as he glimpsed Rru. Jerry couldn't understand it, but he sensed the note of apology in the clicking speech.

"Mr. Jerry Ransom?" the patrolman asked.

Jerry nodded.

The patrolman's gaze went beyond him to the other two. "Miss Kalli Malloon and Mr. Rru Photinus?" he asked.

Jerry nodded again.

"I have an order to arrest the three of you," he said pleasantly. "This gentleman is Mr. Frank Lars of—"

"*Brother* Frank Lars," said the man in the robe.

"—of the Galactic Trade Commis-

*What Rru called the "old city" was on the hill just back of Lunota. It dated to the days before the Federation had made contact with Antares. Before they were influenced by Terran thought, the Antareans had built their buildings in various colors, all from the extreme ends of the spectrum. Consequently these buildings were all invisible to human eyes.

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sion," the patrolman concluded stolidly. "He is here to take charge immediately of any interest held in the Antarean business known as The Posterior Protectory by Jerry Ransom, Kalli Malloon, or Rru Photinus. Any interest in the said business held by any other Antareans will be safe from seizure."

Jerry nodded. It had occurred to him and Rru that something of the sort might happen and they had already transferred all of their interest except for one share each to two Antareans who could be trusted.

"What is the charge?" Jerry asked.

"You are charged with being enemies of the state," the patrolman said. "Will you go quietly?"

"We'll go quietly," Jerry said. He turned to Rru. "Tell your friend not to feel badly. We understand that he had no choice but to guide the patrolman here."

Another clicking exchange passed between Rru and the other Antarean. Then Jerry and his two companions followed the patrolman down the street.

V

WHAT happened on Rigil Kentaurus could hardly be called a trial, since the three defendants were allowed no defense. They were charged with being enemies of the State and with conspiring against the State. The first charge was based on Jerry Ransom's remarks in the meeting with the Imperial President. Those remarks had really concerned the Order of Holy Terra, but since everyone in the government now belonged to the Order, the judge* ruled that the charge was proved. Since neither Rru nor Kalli had contradicted him at the time they were judged as having agreed through silence. The charge of conspiring rested solely on the fact that they had been meeting together every day on Antares I. But that seemed to be quite enough.

The prosecutor made a masterful summation to the jury, consisting of the Privy Cabinet, then leaped nimbly to the bench and instructed the jury to bring in a verdict of guilty.

"Your Imperial Honor," Jerry Ransom said, during the first lull permitting anything to be said, "the defendants would like the opportunity to be heard."

"Be quiet," said the judge. "Under the law of the Galactic Federation of Planets convicted criminals are deprived of all rights, including the right of defense."

"But we are not yet con—" began Jerry.

"Guilty," shouted the foreman of the jury. He was also Privy Minister of Communications so his voice was strong and resonant.

"You see," the judge said triumphantly. "You are hereby ordered exiled from the Galactic Federation of Planets for the rest of your natural lives. The patrol will take you into the unexplored section of the galaxy, to the star system of Sigma Cygni and drop you on the first habitable planet encountered in that system. You will be permitted the usual weapons and supplies provided for political exiles. *Pax vobiscum.*"

"Vo bist du to you, too," Jerry muttered, but he said it under his breath. As bad as things were, they could always be made worse.

The sentence was carried out almost immediately—or, at least, put into operation. Within an hour they were taken aboard a Patrol ship and it blasted off at once.

It took almost ten days to reach Sigma Cygni. During the trip the three were kept confined to their quarters with no chance to talk to each other. Their first awareness that they had arrived was when they felt the ship drop down to a cruising speed. Patrolmen soon came and took them to the commander's office.

"We are now," the commander said, "circling over a planet which is the approximate size of Terra. Our instrument readings show that gravity and air content also approximate that of Terra. Our

* The Imperial President acted as judge. Since he was also the prosecutor and the chief witness for the prosecution, his was the most trying ordeal of the day. But he carried it off with a dignity and grace that proved he was well suited for the high office which he held.

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Proteindex indicates that there is some sort of life on the planet. We are launching you at once."

"Is there intelligent life on it?" Rru Photinus asked.

"We do not know," the commander said. "That is no concern of ours. My orders are merely to drop you on the first habitable planet which we find in this system. This is it, sir. Prepare to disembark."

They were given no opportunity to ask further questions. They were issued a thermostat-controlled o v e r s u i t each, enough food concentrates to last them about two weeks, and three energy guns locked in the lowest field. They'd be able to defend themselves, since the charges were enough to stun most forms of life, but that was all. With these few meager supplies, they were loaded into a three-place life ship and it was launched through the air-locks.

AS THE small ship nosed into the atmosphere of the planet below, Jerry Ransom made a hurried survey of the control panel. Then he returned to sit between his two companions.

"It's about as I thought," he said. "There's just about the exact amount of fuel needed to get this boat to the ground. And unless I've made a mistake, the jet chamber on this one is a special job. I think it's a thermite chamber with a magnesium ribbon time-fed into it. All of which means that even if we should be lucky enough to find fuel, it will do us no good. Pretty, huh?"

"One must concede," Rru said philosophically, that you Terrans are most efficient when it comes to destructive methods."

I'm afraid you're right, Rru," Jerry said dolefully.

Kalli Malloon leaned against Jerry's shoulder and shivered. "I'm afraid," she said simply.

For a moment, aided by the dim light in the ship, Jerry forgot that she was an unattractive woman. He slipped an arm around her and held her close.

"I'm sorry, Kalli," he said gently. "I should have insisted that you stop working for me as soon as this started. Then you wouldn't be here."

"I'm not afraid just for myself," she said against his shoulder. "I'm just as much afraid for you—and—and for Rru, as for myself. What will we do?"

"I don't know," Jerry admitted. "We can't tell until we get down and see what it's like. I'd guess that there's a pretty good chance of finding intelligent life down there. What do you think, Rru?"

"Personally, I'd say yes," Rru answered. When he continued, there was a note of irony in his voice. "But I noticed that the Federation scientists recently announced they were certain that all the intelligent life in the universe had already been discovered. They had some very good reasons, but I noticed that the same reasoning would have ruled out intelligent life on the planets where we know it exists."

Jerry grinned. "The next point on the agenda," he said, "is, will we be able to communicate with them if we find an intelligent life form. I notice our friends didn't supply us with cybernetic translators. I guess the theory is that unfriendly natives can solve the exile problem as well as anything else."

"Better," said Rru. He pointed ahead. "We'll soon know."

The small ship had plowed through a layer of clouds and emerged in sunshine. Below them curved a green planet.

Jerry's prediction about the ship came true. When they were a thousand feet from the ground, the motor stopped and they glided the rest of the way. Jerry picked out an open spot in the forest of what looked like fern trees and set the ship down. They had hardly stepped out on the ground before a ribbon of smoke curled up from the sealed engine compartment. They moved quickly away and watched while the smoke spiraled up above the tree tops. Finally it thinned out to a wisp and then even that died. Nothing else had caught fire.

"Well," Jerry said, "it might serve as a slightly cramped apartment, but that's all it's good for. Let's go." He picked up his plastic of food, the gun, and even the

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oversuit, though the climate seemed to be such that they wouldn't need warm clothing.

"Where?" Kalli asked.

"Right now, anywhere. There's nothing here but trees and a useless life ship. We've got nothing to lose."

They marched straight ahead through the forest of giant trees. All around them was quiet, the only sound the slight soughing of wind through the trees. Once they heard a strange cry in the distance, but there was no way of telling whether it was an animal or a bird. An hour of steady walking brought them to the edge of the forest. Ahead, as far as they could see, stretched level fields covered with a fine, lace-like grass, perhaps two feet high and light purple in color. They hesitated at the edge of it, looking around.

"We'd better be careful through this," Jerry said. "We have no way of knowing what sort of small life might be in the grasses. Most of the planets have their share of poisonous animals of one sort or another."

"I'll go first," Rru suggested. "My eyes are better adapted than yours for this sort of work and they're closer to the ground."

Jerry nodded.

"Wait," Kalli said suddenly. "If we're looking for trouble, maybe we don't even have to search for it."

Jerry and Rru looked in the direction she was pointing and saw that something was moving toward them. Row after row of strange creatures were coming speedily across the fields. Even at a distance there was enough order and purpose in the march to indicate intelligence.

SOON, however, they drew near enough so that the individual creatures could be seen clearly. At first glance, they seemed very similar to animals still known on Terra. They stood about six feet high, with small pointed faces and alert ears and were covered with short brown hair or fur. They stood upright on sturdy stilt-like hind legs and moved with leaps of ten to fifteen feet. Each of them possessed a long, thick tail which seemed to aid them in their leaps. But where the Terran animals had front legs, these possessed modified hands.* Each one of them held a twenty-foot spear in his hand. They had slowed up somewhat, but there was nothing peaceful-looking in their slow but steady advance.

"Look," Kalli cried. There was a strong note of hysteria in her voice.

At first, neither Jerry nor Rru could imagine what had further disturbed her. Then suddenly Jerry saw it too. The army was twice as big as they had first thought it to be, for a second individual was being carried by each one of the natives in a marsupial pouch in the stomach. It was similar to the pouches in which Terran kangaroos carry their young, but these were definitely not infants. They were similar in appearance to their bearers, yet different enough to indicate another species.** Each of these second individuals was so small that only the head and shoulders showed above the mouth of the pouch. And each one held a weapon which strongly resembled the ancient Terran weapons known as crossbows which Jerry had once seen in the museum.

"Well," Jerry said, "the weapons at least indicate some degree of intelligence. If they have the ability to make such dangerous artifacts, perhaps they can be persuaded not to use them."

He stood up a little straighter and advanced ahead of his two companions. He held up an open hand in a gesture of peace and called out to them in Ter-

*They were, as Jerry later discovered, quite similar to the Terran sub-class **Metatheria**, or kangaroo, although they had developed quite independently on this planet. They had also evolved far beyond those on Terra, the hands being only one example of this development.

These, too, it was learned were similar to another Terran animal, the **Dipodomys, once known on Terra as kangaroo rats or two-footed mice. On Terra, these animals never grew beyond eight to fifteen inches in length, including their tail. These, on the other hand were, they later learned, almost two feet in length. They, too, had evolved along similar lines to the bigger species, so that there were two intelligent races native to this planet. While a number of scientists have tried to claim that both had been brought to the planet from Terra some fifteen hundred years earlier, the consensus was that both were native and had merely paralleled Terran animals up to a point.

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ran. They advanced faster. He tried simplifying his Terran, even to the point of shouting "Me friend" and pounding his own chest. He tried a number of Vegan. Aldabaran and Rigilian dialects without any more success. He had just switched to Capellanese when a motion in the front line caught his eye. He dropped to the ground just in time. A small arrow whistled angrily over his head and plunked solidly into a tree a good twenty feet back of him.

A moment later, Rru and Kalli joined him on the ground as an avalanche of the small arrows swarmed through the air. The attack was on. The kangaroo-like beings came leaping forward, the huge spears poised for the moment when they got closer. The small pouch-riders were all busily fitting new arrows to their crossbows.

"Prudence would seem to dictate that we become more aggressive," Rru Photinus muttered.

"I'm afraid so," Jerry said. "Rru, you take the right flank, Kalli the center, and I'll take the left flank."

THEY stayed on the ground, their guns drawn. When Jerry gave the word they began firing. The attackers dropped in waves. Within minutes two-thirds of them were lying unconscious on the ground. The others fled, going away in great leaps which soon carried them out of sight.

"At least," Jerry said, getting to his feet, "we now know which way to go."

"Back into the forest?" Kalli said.

"No, straight ahead. If they don't want us to go in that direction, then it's a pretty safe bet that if there's any hope for us it lies that way."

"One could say that they're almost human," Rru commented.

"I'm afraid you're right," Jerry said. "But it seems to me that you're becoming cynical. I remember the time when you were bubbling over with enthusiasm over the fact that the wonderful Terrans were coming to Antares."

"Ah, youth," said Rru, waving his antennae wryly. "That was before I had been exposed to some of the more interesting institutions of Terrans. Present company excepted, of course."

"Of course." Jerry grinned. "The trouble with you, Rru, is that you're an old, cynical firefly. What would my ancestors have thought if they'd known that some day I'd be standing around talking to a cynical lightning bug."

"Probably the same thing mine would have thought if anyone had told them that I'd be treating a two-legged man-thing as an equal," Rru said drily.

"I don't know about your ancestors," Kalli said acidly, "but if you two insist on standing around here arguing about them, I know what your descendants will be saying about you."

"She's right," Jerry said. "Let's go."

They picked their way through the bodies scattered over the field, pausing once to examine two of the unconscious warriors. There was nothing new to be learned. Neither species wore any clothing and there was nothing on them except their weapons. The two Terrans and the Antarean hurried on through the field.

"As long as we're in this purple grass," Kalli grumbled to Rru, "you might at least try to do something about the color of your halo. The green clashes horribly with the purple."

"Esthetics she's got to think about," grumbled Rru. But he obligingly concentrated for a minute and his halo turned from green to red.

"That's a little better," Kalli said, "although a nice shade of lavender would be even nicer."

"Young lady," Rru said with mock dignity, "you forget that my ancestors were wearing halos when yours still thought that lights were magic. The fact that your power packs can produce any color of halo, while we have to stagger along with only two colors, is of doubtful value—especially now."

"Who's bickering this time?" Jerry said to Kalli. She made a face at him, but didn't answer.

They marched for several hours without seeing any more of the natives. Then, as they crossed a small ravine, there was another rushing attack. But they were

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more wary this time and soon retreated before the blazing energy guns.

The harrying tactics continued. Every few hours there would come a slashing attack. It would last only a few minutes, then the attackers would fade away, leaving behind a handful of unconscious warriors.

FOR three days, they marched across fields and through the great fern forests, beating off the attacks. By night, one of them kept guard while the other two slept with guns at hand, ready to leap up at the first cry of warning.

The third night they camped beside a great ruby-colored lake. Jerry Ransom had the early morning watch. It had been a quiet night and when daylight revealed no sign of the natives Jerry decided to investigate the lake. He strolled down to the edge and scooped up a handful of the water. It felt cool and refreshing to his hands. While they still had plenty of food and juice concentrates, he knew the time might come when they'd have to live off the land of the new planet. He was also aware that his slight reluctance to taste the water was nothing more than a prejudice against drinking water which was the color of blood. He scooped up another handful and took a mouthful of it. He rinsed it around, then spit it out. If anything, it tasted better than Terran water. He swallowed the next mouthful. There was a slightly effervescent quality to it which he found refreshing.

He took another look around. Everything was quiet and the only living things in sight were the two sleepers, barely visible a hundred yards away through the trees. Jerry stripped off his clothes and went into the lake. The cool red water lapped at his flesh and he felt a mild exhilaration.

He had no idea how long he'd been bathing, diving through the roughest waves with pleasure, when he looked up and saw a number of the natives standing on the shore and watching him.

For a minute he hesitated in paralyzed inaction, then he came out of the water with a rush, diving for the spot where he'd left his clothes and gun. Halfway there, he checked his rush, suddenly aware that their attitude was friendly. The larger natives leaned on their spears, while the crossbows of the smaller ones were not in evidence as they peered from the pouches. The expressions on their faces conveyed an impression of friendly interest.

"Now what do you suppose came over them?" Jerry muttered to himself. He wondered how he could communicate with them and was about to embark on some sort of arm-waving signals when one of them stepped forth.

"Good morrow, sir," it said. "It does please our fancy that you have well recovered from that which ailed you, be it fistula or pox. Belike, we are cater-cousins now."

Jerry stared at them in amazement. This was Terran which they spoke, yet unlike it as he had ever heard it spoken.

"Fistula or pox?" Jerry said. "I don't understand. I haven't been sick."

"By'r lakin, your very blood must have been in a fever if you have forgotten it already. Why, there—" he pointed to Jerry's clothes on the ground—"are the very bandages which swathed your body like some Egyptian mummy. We feared that you might set a plague upon the whole of Mallos which is why we tried to fetch you by the heels. How fare your two companions?"

"They're fine," Jerry said in a daze. He'd seen some queer cultures throughout the galaxy, but this was the first in which clothes were so little known that they could be mistaken for bandages. "Mallos? Is that the name of this planet?"

"Even so. This is the world of Mallos."

"How are you called? Mallosians?"

"Nay. There are the children of Mallos, even as you must be. 'Tis true we use the speech of Mallos, and, i'feck, our forefathers gained much from Mallos, but we are as he called us bully-rooks. And these—" indicating the smaller creature riding in its pouch—"are hangman boys."

"I see," Jerry said gravely. Without

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thinking, he walked over and picked up his clothes.

"Hold!" the bully-rook said. "And speak me fair. Is the pox upon you yet that you think to wrap yourself again?"

The spears were all raised, pointing vaguely in Jerry's direction. "No, no," said Jerry hastily, dropping his clothes. "I—I was just looking at them and being glad I was rid of them." In a way this was true, since it seemed to be the only reason that they were friendly.

"Then let us proceed to your companions, since you say they have now recovered, and we will guide you to the children of Mallos. They will rejoice with your good health. Come."

"Wait a minute," Jerry said. He knew that Rru and Kalli were sleeping fully clothed and that the sight of the clothes might prompt a shower of spears. He thought quickly. "You see, we weren't aware that you were attacking us only because we seemed to be ill. If they awake suddenly and see all of you around, they might hurt some of you before I could explain it to them. Better let me go get them and we'll join you here."

"It is well, sirrah."

LEAVING his clothes there on the edge of the lake, and taking only his gun, Jerry walked rapidly toward the spot where the others were sleeping. Though certainly no prude—no one was in the 31st Century—he felt ill at ease about suddenly appearing before his secretary without benefit of clothes.

Just as he approached them, Kalli Malloon awakened. She sat up, starting to yawn. Then her gaze fell on Jerry and the yawn was never finished. There was a glint of approval in her eyes.

"Well," she said sleepily, "what's this? A back-to-nature movement?"

The sound of her voice wakened Rru, who got up blinking as he caught sight of Jerry.

"Just give us a bare answer," he clowned with a yawn.

Jerry ignored both sallies. He told them quickly what had happened and his reasons for undressing.

"I think," he added, "that what they call the Children of Mallos must be Terrans, although I don't know how to explain the archaic way they talk or the fact that they don't wear clothes."

"I guess," said Kalli, "that you're suggesting that we also undress."

"I think it'll be safer," Jerry said.

"Well, this is one aspect of the job you never explained when you hired me," she grumbled, but there was a twinkle in her eyes.

"Personally, I find it encouraging," said Rru, already divesting himself of his clothing. "I've often wondered how far into the animal kingdom the Terrans could penetrate with their custom of tying a piece of colored rope around the neck. I'm sure it represents some perverted urge to self-strangulation." He kicked off the last of his clothing and vibrated his antennae. "Ah, freedom. I must remember to start a movement if I ever get back to Antares."

"The clothing trust won't like it," Jerry said in good humor. He was being careful not to look at Kalli while she undressed; he was almost painfully aware that anyone who covered herself so thoroughly must find this an unpleasant experience.

"Do you think I'd better remove my glasses, too?" Kalli asked.

"Can you see without them?"

"Oh, sure," she said cheerfully. "So the glasses go. Now, shall we go parade before your friends so they can see we're sound of limb?"

Jerry turned to look at her. He was prepared to utter some polite phrase which would imply that she was attractive, thinking thus to put her at ease. His mouth was already framing the first syllable when he saw her, and his breath escaped in what could only be called a whistle of admiration.

There was nothing about her to remind him of the unattractive lump who had been hired as his secretary. She had not only taken off her clothes and removed her glasses, she had taken down her hair. What Jerry had considered just another knot of mousy hair was suddenly revealed as reddish blonde hair of

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shimmering beauty. Released, it swirled down around her shoulders like a cascade of gold. As for the rest of her, what her method of dressing had concealed was beyond the powers of imagination.

"What's wrong?" Kalli asked in mock terror. "Am I too freckled or something?"

"You're beautiful," Jerry said.

"Why, thank you, Mr. Ransom. I didn't realize you noticed such things."

"How could I before?" Jerry demanded. He suddenly felt self-consciously glad that his own body was lean and shapely. "Why the devil did you try to see how homely you could make yourself with those clothes and that hair-do?"

"Protective coloration," she said. She was obviously enjoying herself. "You'll forgive my lack of modesty if I point out that I'm a good secretary. As a result, I've always worked for important men—the sort who were always going off to Ganymede for the week end. Since I wanted both to keep my job and to stay away from Ganymede, something of the sort was necessary."

"If you'll forgive a slight intrusion," Rru Photinus interjected, "there is a time and place for everything. In the meantime, I believe our—er—friends are getting restless. They probably think you're examining each other for signs of a new plague."

Jerry laughed self-consciously as he turned to lead the way back toward the lake.

The natives waited there, eyeing their approach with interest.

"You spoke fair," one of them said to Jerry. "They seem well recovered from their vapours." His gaze went back to Kalli for a moment. "A comely collop," he said with approval. "Come, we will go." They turned and started around the lake.

Two days later, the natives led Jerry, Kalli and Rru down into a beautiful jade green valley. A crimson brook wound through the center of it and there were a few great yellow trees growing along its banks. Occasionally they caught a glimpse of strange birds in the trees. They were like nothing on Terra, or in the rest of the galaxy, but their songs were pleasant. There were no other signs of life.

"Where are the children of Mallos?" Jerry asked the leader of the natives.

"They would have sighted us as we came over yonder hill," he said. "They will soon appear."

He was right. They had no more than arrived at the center of the valley when the children of Mallos came over the top of the nearest hill. They were definitely human, several hundred men, women and children. They wore no clothing and their bodies were lean and tawny.

They were an awe-inspiring sight as they floated over the hill, fully a hundred feet above the ground. Their bodies were gracefully erect, their arms held straight in front of them. Except that their feet did not move, they might have been walking on air.

VI

THE children of Mallos floated down into the valley, lighting on their feet as gracefully as birds. They made the three visitors welcome, using the same stilted Terran the natives had spoken. Although they used many words unknown to the three visitors, they succeeded in making themselves well understood. They then invited the visitors to join them and seemed amazed to learn that neither Jerry nor Kalli could rise from the ground as they did. Apparently they didn't expect the effortless flight from Rru, but only from the humans. When they heard this was impossible, several of them crowded around Jerry and Kalli and examined them closer, especially their hands.

It was while they were doing this that Jerry Ransom noticed that the children of Mallos did wear something. Each of them, including the very young, wore a number of rings on the fingers of each hand. The rings were crudely hammered out of some metal and were set with large, brightly colored stones.

When the examination seemed to con-

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vince them that Jerry and Kalli were incapable of leaving the ground, Jerry suspected that there was a connection between the rings and their defiance of gravity.

The children of Mallos rose again into the air and floated slowly over the hill. The kangaroo-like warriors led the way in pedestrian pursuit.

On the other side of the hill, nestled in another valley, there were hundreds of small wooden bungalows. They were crude, yet there was something pleasant about them. They were especially inviting to Jerry and Kalli, there being something essentially human about the houses, and they were made to feel less isolated than they had since landing on the planet.

Jerry was both embarrassed and delighted when he and Kalli were told to occupy one of the cottages. Both emotions were increased by the fact that she said nothing. Rru, on the other hand, was asked to go to the village of the natives, a large collection of huts only a few hundred yards away. Jerry was going to protest this obvious segregation, but Rru wouldn't have it. Despite his sincere liking for Jerry, Rru was developing a strong antipathy to human beings, even those who weren't directly from Terra.

Jerry was intensely curious about these humans who called themselves the children of Mallos. During the next few days he questioned any of them whenever he had the opportunity. He learned almost at once that his guess about the rings had been correct. The stones in the rings held the secret of their ability to float in the air, but none of them could explain how it worked. So far as they knew, they and their kind had always had such stones and they had long since taken the operation for granted. They did tell him that the stones were cultivated and promised to take him to the next crystal harvest, which would be within a few days.

As for their origins, they were unable to tell him anything which would account for their speaking the Terran language, or that would permit him to tie them in with some early exploration party from the Solar System. They knew nothing of space ships, nor could they grasp the idea that men might fly through space from one world to another. They never failed to enjoy hearing Jerry tell about the world from which he came, but they refused to believe that it was anything but a clever tale. They applauded him each time he told it and complimented him on his cleverness.

They claimed they were all descended from a great Emperor of their past whose name had been Mallos and they apparently believed that before Mallos there had been no humans. They had many legends which explained the creation of Mallos—some claiming that he sprang full grown from the side of a mountain, others that he was the offspring of a mating between thunder and lightning. Then the legends explained how he pulled two young saplings from the ground and sang a love song over them until they changed into two beautiful women who became his wives. They promised Jerry that the night before the crystal harvest he would hear the song that Mallos had sung over the saplings. This, their manner indicated, would prove the truth of the story.

OF MALLOS himself, they knew little that could possibly be related to fact. But they were emphatic about his greatest attributes. He had been a mighty singer of songs, a drinker of tremendous capacity, and an incomparable fighter. There wasn't a man among the children of Mallos who did not aspire to the deeds of his ancestor, and even the young boys bragged of how they would emulate him when they were grown.

The night before the harvest soon arrived. The celebration was to be held in the small valley where they had first seen the children of Mallos. Jerry and Kalli walked over the hill shortly after dark. The kangaroo-like natives, who seemed to serve the humans without quite being servants, had built a huge bonfire and departed. The flames of the fire, with the aid of three moons circling lazily overhead, made the valley

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almost as light as day.

They had barely arrived when the children of Mallos began floating down out of the sky, singing as they dropped. The very air shivered with the mighty chorus. Jerry Ransom put his arm around Kalli as the words came down on a wave of music.

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills and fields,
Woods or steepy mountain yields.
And we shall sit upon the rocks
Seeing the bullies feed their flocks
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.
And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle,
A ring of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs;
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me and be my love.
The bully-rooks shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

As the last line was sung, the children of Mallos lighted upon the ground.

"That's the song," Jerry said excitedly to Kalli. "The song they claim the Emperor Mallos sang to the two saplings."

"It's beautiful," Kalli said. "I can almost believe that it would make even saplings long to be women."

"Of course it's beautiful," Jerry said. "But it's also an old Terran song. I've got to find out how they inherited it."

Before he could pursue the thought farther, a group of men and women came to bring them over to join the others. Soon dozens of smaller fires were burning near the bonfire and over these they were spit-roasting a variety of small animals. Others were rolling out large bins of wine from the spots where the bully-rooks had delivered them.

Jerry had already tasted their wines and knew them to be superior to most of the brands sold in the Federation. He and Kalli joined wholeheartedly in the feasting and drinking and merriment that followed.

When the last bone had been stripped white and the bins had been considerably lowered, there were numerous fights among the young men. They fought with long graceful swords, or short needle-sharp hand knives, moving over the short grass like ballet dancers. It was difficult to realize, until a burst of blood would suddenly blossom against brown skin, that this was more than a game.

There was more singing and the telling of legends and now and then a couple would slip off to where only the light of the moons might share their passing moment.

Kalli had tarried to listen to another song while Jerry joined a group which was telling another legend about the mighty Mallos. When the tale was finished, he went in search of Kalli. He spotted her just as one of the young men approached her. He stopped and eavesdropped without shame.

"Save you, fair mistress," the young man said as he came up to her.

"And you, child of Mallos," Kalli returned.

"What do you here alone? Meditating upon your abandoned virtue?"

"Neither abandoned nor neglected," Kalli said, laughing. She had already spotted Jerry, but made no sign of it. "How can it be neglected when man is ever an enemy to a woman's virtue. Tell me, how may a woman guard against her enemy?"

"Fend him off—if fend you must."

"But he still attacks. Tell me some warlike resistance."

"Face it with a card of ten, fair lady; there is none. Man was born to undermine you."

"I believe that men think so," Kalli said. "But you're a swordsman. There must be some fencing strategy by which a woman may undermine men and save her virtue."

"Let me think on 't," he said. He pretended serious thought. "In fencing, one must feint, parry, and thrust. 'Twouldn't do to faint. The soldier who faints, leaves the city unguarded, the walls are quickly breached. To parry or not to parry, aye, there's a question. Virtue kept is virtue lost; 'tis like an old miser who hoards

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his gold out of fashion; richly earned, but unearning. Away with 't."

Kalli laughed. "I like your argument even though it doesn't convince me."

"Then let us put another face upon it. As Mallos himself once sang it—" He threw his head back and sang.

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure:
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come and kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.

"A pretty song," Kalli said when he'd finished. "Is it one of your old songs or did you compose it for my benefit?"

The young man frowned at the turn to the conversation. "As I did explain," he said, "Mallos himself sung it. In the olden days when virtue was not for pribbles and prabbles, but for the losing."

Jerry had listened as long as he could. He strode ahead to join them.

"You're a gay dog in your luxury," he said to the young man. He had picked up some of their expressions in the several weeks they had lived with the children of Mallos. "Go, sir, rub your chain with crumbs."

The young man looked at him expectantly. "You wish to try me, sirrah?"

"Not you," Jerry said firmly. "The lady's more my liking."

The young man laughed. "An excellent pass of pate."

"Then go have a stoup of wine on't," Jerry said.

"I'll go, but I'll not swear to stay. The neglected fruit tree invites the traveler in its ripening." He strode off toward another group of revelers.

"You know," Jerry said, looking after him, "I think that's a young man of wisdom and foresight. Come on."

"Where are we going?"

"Back to our cottage. These *children* of Mallos are too damned precocious in certain respects for my taste."

"But it's such a nice party," Kalli said, hanging back.

"Okay, it's a nice party, but we're going back to the cottage."

"Is that an order?" she asked demurely.

"If you want to take it that way," he said shortly. "You are still my secretary."

"Yes, Mr. Ransom," she murmured and fell into step beside him.

They walked over the hill and to the cottage in silence. Once they were inside, he pulled her roughly to him.

"Did you want me to take some dictation, Mr. Ransom?" she asked.

He didn't answer, having never learned how to talk while he was kissing a girl.

VII

EARLY the following morning a group of the young men came for Jerry Ransom. He recognized most of them although he knew no way to identify them in speaking to them. One of the things which made social communication difficult was that the children of Mallos had no names. They in turn chose to ignore the fact that he and Kalli and Rru had names. They called Rru a bully-rook just as they called the other non-humans, while Jerry and Kalli were "Sirrah" and "My Lady" or something similar.

The young men had come for Jerry because this was the day of the crystal harvest. Curiosity overcame his sleepiness and he soon joined them after they called to him from outside the cottage.

They brought a handful of rings with them and finally found six that would fit him. They put three on each of his hands, warning him to hold his hands palms up while they explained how the rings worked. With one of them demonstrating just over his head, they told how to hold his hands for rising in the air, for hovering, for moving in various directions. He began to get an idea of how the crystals worked although he could see no explanation for why they worked. Apparently the underside of the crystals set up a field of repulsion against any object which would normally attract. Since there is some attraction, or gravity pull, between

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two bodies of any size*, the rings permitted them to move along fairly steadily, although at no great speed.

It sounded pretty simple to Jerry and then they let him try. He moved his hands with the ease of an expert and suddenly he shot several feet into the air. He had some idea of showing these children of Mallos a thing or two—and he did. When he was about fifteen feet in the air, he tried to execute a smart right about face. Instead he did a neat outside loop and smacked against the ground. When he lifted his hand to rub the spot that was hurting, he bounced ten feet into the air.

By moving his hands very carefully, he managed to lower himself gingerly while the children of Mallos howled with laughter.

Somewhat chastened, Jerry tried a few more times and soon began to get the hang of it. When it was certain that he could more or less stay afloat, they all took to the air and moved away from the cottages.

About an hour later, after traveling what Jerry estimated to be ten miles, they come down in a small, barren field. Once they landed, Jerry saw that it was not quite so barren as he'd first thought. The ground was literally covered with crystals, in all the hues of the rainbow. They were scattered over the field like so many pebbles.

"They work up out of the ground," one of the men explained. "Even though we might pluck the field as bald as a pate, at the rise of the next full moon, it would be full again."

"But why don't they just float away?" Jerry asked. "Since they're capable of lifting a man, they ought to be able to lift themselves."

"These are but green crystals," one of them explained. "Green and young, but hold, you'll see!"

Each man gathered up as many crystals as he could carry, Jerry joining in, and then they went to the edge of the field. It was lined with giant fern trees. The roots of many of the trees arched partly above the ground like the tentacles of some huge octopus. It was to those trees that they went. They dumped the crystals on the ground and sat down around the pile of glittering stones.

ONE of the men went to a hollow tree stump and returned with a number of knives. He passed the knives among the others and they went to work on the crystals. First, a cut would be made almost to the center of the crystal, then pressure would be exerted on one side of the crystal until there was a slight dislocation where the cut had been made.

Jerry watched them, but no one offered an explanation of what they were doing or why. "I don't get it," Jerry said finally. "What does cutting the crystals have to do with their power to lift?"

"This will make the crystal grow*, one of them said. "Only when it is fully grown can the crystal fly as you've seen it."

When the last of the crystals was cut, they gathered them up and walked over to the exposed roots. They stripped some small branches from a nearby bush and peeled the bark from them. Then they knelt down beside the large roots and began removing crystals from beneath

* If you have wondered why you always feel attracted to that blonde when you pass her on the street, it's simply a matter of gravity. Supposing that you weigh about 150 pounds and she weighs around 120, if you pass within one foot of her you will be attracted to her with a force equal to

$$\frac{150 \cdot 120}{30.2 \cdot 109} = 6 \cdot 10^{-7} \text{ pound.}$$

Now, all you have to do is convince the blonde that it's gravity.

* By accident, or through some primitive science, the children of Mallos had hit upon a method of making crystals grow which is known on modern Terra. The cutting of the crystals which Jerry witnessed caused what is known as a screw dislocation. This is a step in the surface of the crystal, with the material at one side pushed down by one molecular diameter. At a distance of a few intermolecular distances from the axis, the crystal will appear to deviate very little from perfection: only very near the axis will anything seem to be wrong. But as a result of this the molecules in the crystal will no longer lie on planes but on a screw surface about the axis. If the vapour surrounding such a dislocated crystal is above the equilibrium value, growth takes place by the forward movement of the step as before, but now the step does not disappear, but simply rotates like the hand of a clock about the axis. After one revolution, a complete new layer of molecules will have been added, but the step will be in its initial angular position.

The theory of growth from a melt is not covered by the above considerations, and further work is necessary before an overall picture can be given. In the meantime, however, very fine pictures of overalls are available through Sears, Roebuck.

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them. The crystals they took out were three times the size of the ones brought from the field. Jerry could see peculiar whirl patterns on one side of each stone. As each one was brought out, it was tied to a small branch with the pattern of whirls against the branch. And immediately another crystal would be placed beneath the root, cut surface uppermost.

By watching and listening as the men worked, Jerry began to get the picture. Only one side of the stones had the power to negate the gravitational pull*. They were placed with that surface next to the tree root; when it had grown enough to react against any attraction, it reacted against the root which made it press against the ground so there was no danger of losing them. In the same way, tying them to the branches and holding these so that the active side always pointed away from the major body—that is, the planet—they could carry them home.

When they had gathered all of the grown crystals, they took off for the cottages. When they arrived, Jerry had to return the rings he'd used for the trip, but they promised him that he'd soon have a set of his own.

When first they had come to the village of the children of Mallos, Jerry had hoped that contact with other humans would mean there was hope that they could construct some sort of ship that would enable them to escape from the planet. It hadn't taken long for that hope to vanish. It was quite obvious that a culture which knew nothing of clothes, fought only with swords, and believed they were descended from a man born of a mountain—to say nothing of the fact that they laughed at the thought of anyone traveling through space—would be of little assistance in building a space ship.

Despite this, Jerry had not given up the thought of escaping. He had no desire to spend the rest of his days on this strange planet, even though those days would be considerably brightened by Kalli. And there was still the problem of the Dibbles and the Order of Holy Terra. It was something which Jerry was not apt to forget for a long time.

THE night after they returned from the crystal harvest, Jerry walked over to the huts of the bully-rooks. After asking for directions, he found Rru in one of the huts. The only light in it came from a tallow candle, much like that in Jerry's own cottage.

"Well, Mr. Ransom, suh, it's sho mighty nice of yo' to visit us'ns," Rru said. His exaggerated accent came from the fact that Rru had been a more than interested student of Terran history and that he felt like taking digs at Terrans, even when it was one he liked.

"Drop it," Jerry said. "I didn't come four hundred and sixty-five light years to listen to your corny jokes. One more of them and I'll let you stay here and feed your cornballs to the bully-rooks."

"It might even be preferable," Rru said dryly. "Don't tell me you're thinking of walking back home? I wouldn't mind if it weren't for that first long step over to Deneb."

Jerry ignored it. "Rru," he said, "you're more familiar with the space trade lanes than I am. Shouldn't there be some trade ships or freighters passing through this system?"

Rru thought a moment. "Ships that stop at Sagittarius should go through Cygni—but hardly within hailing distance of this planet."

"As long as they go through," Jerry said cheerfully. "There's a space law that says ships must drop out of overdrive when passing through any star system. If they slow down that much, that's

* As it was later discovered, the crystals were formed deep within the planet of a contramass substance. They were the first substance discovered anywhere in the universe to which Newton's law of gravitation could not be applied. While the full explanation of why this was possible cannot be adequately explained in simple lay language, the great Nunkian mathematician, Feso-4, has explained it as follows: Whereas every other particle in the universe attracts every other particle with a force which is directly proportional to the product of the masses of the particles and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them, when one of the particles is a Mallos Crystal there is a repulsion proportional to the mass of the second particle and inversely proportional to the square of the diameter of the second particle. Thus the force of the repulsion between MC and M_1, in grams, is given by

$$F = \frac{G.MC.M_2}{d^2}$$

dynes, where G is the gravitational constant, 6.659 x 10—8 C.G.S. units.

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all I'll ask."

Rru dropped his air of levity. "You've got a plan, Jerry?"

"I've got a plan," Jerry admitted. "I think it'll get us away from here—if it falls through we can always come back and live the simple pastoral life."

"And the Dibbles?" Rru asked.

"If we get away, I think the same idea can be adapted to take care of the Dibbles."

"The Imperial President?"

"Him, too."

"If you can guarantee to deliver," Rru said soberly, "you can count me in all the way. I'll even try to make that long first step to Deneb, but you may have to give me a little shove."

"You try not to be in on it," Jerry said affectionately, "and I'll give you a big shove."

"What about Halos, Inc.?" Rru wanted to know.

"To hell with Halos, Inc.," Jerry said. "We're going to tie a runaway rocket to the tail of Dibbles and friends, both political and parasitical. Then I'm going to make an honest woman out of Kalli and retire to some quiet corner of the galaxy. Let somebody else get rich."

"You took the words right out of my mandibles," Rru said.

"I've got other plans for you," Jerry said darkly.

"What?"

"You'll see. First things first, my fine Antarean."

"Okay, first things first. Suppose you tell me how you're going to make a dent in the political setup. I've never been able to understand how they work it, but I do know they've got an iron grip on the Federation with a downhill pull. Haven't the non-humanoid races, which far outnumber you Terrans, been trying to shake that Rigil Kentaurus gang loose for years with no luck? What makes you think you got a bigger shake?"

"There isn't much to understand about it," Jerry said. "They jammed through a law over two hundred years ago so that all voting is done by peer-groups. As long as they plant enough machine politicians they've got it sewed up." *

"I can think of a number of machine politicians who should be planted—six feet under," Rru murmured. "How are you going to get around that setup when no one else has been able to?"

"I expect it could be done now through the Order of Holy Terra. What they've done is set up one gigantic peer-group which they control. That, I suspect, is why the Imperial President was so anxious to help them. He knew they were getting a political machine even stronger than his. But I think there's still a better way."

"What?"

"We'll promote them," Jerry said. "Kick them upstairs."

Rru agitated his antennae. "I don't understand."

"I'll give you a practical demonstration when we get away from here," Jerry said. He stood up. "Just be ready to leave."

"Who's got anything to pack?" Rru said.

Jerry went back to the cottages. Early the next morning he started talking up his project. It took him two days to get any of the children of Mallos to believe he meant what he was saying. Once they were convinced of that, they quickly adapted themselves to a belief that he was hopelessly insane. Once they accepted this, they were quite willing to give him all the help he wanted.

WITHIN a few days they had built a large raft. They made several comfortable pallets and pillows from the hides of small shmoo-like animals. They also helped Jerry to gather a number of large pieces of well-dried bark and to

* The Peer-Group Voting Law meant simply that you voted with your peers as a unit. That is, all the workers, say, in a given factory or business voted as a unit, with all the votes being cast to a single candidate. Which candidate was determined by the majority in the peer-group. This sounded fair enough at first hearing, until you realized that very few individuals dared to be different from their peer-group. Conformity was the highest goal in the 31st Century. All the political machine had to do was place one strong machine man in each peer-group. If he were capable of assuming leadership of the peer-group, and they picked no other kind, then he was dictating the voting of the entire group.

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print large letters on them with pieces of charcoal. They gave him a generous stock of the crystals.

Then came the day for the launching of what had laughingly become known as Jerry's Folly. Jerry, Kalli and Rru climbed on the raft, carrying the food and juice concentrates which they had saved even after meeting the children of Mallos. The entire populations of both small villages had turned out to watch. They stood around, grinning broadly and waiting for the cue to laugh.

Jerry leaned over and adjusted the crystals which he had fastened beneath the raft. They were all held between split branches which could be controlled by a single lever he had attached to the side of the raft.

The strange craft rose slowly into the air and continued to rise straight up. Within a half hour, the children of Mallos were mere dots on the ground below; within an hour they could no longer be seen.

They continued to rise until the air had thinned enough to be noticeable in their breathing. Then Jerry once more adjusted the stones and the raft became stationary.

"So far, so good," Rru said, peering uncertainly over the edge of the raft. "What do we do now? Wait for a strong wind and then hold our breaths? We can't keep it up too long, you know."

"Despite all our faults," Jerry said, "you must admit that we Terrans occasionally come up with a clever idea. Centuries ago, when Terrans traveled in slow land-cars, there were many who couldn't own a vehicle of their own, just as today most persons can't own a spaceship. So they hit on the idea of getting others to give them free rides. They used some sort of a strange salute with the thumb which was apparently recognized by everyone. They were known as hitch-hikers, I believe. We are about to adapt this ancient method to more modern times."

"How does one make the thumb salute?" Rru asked curiously. "And who in the universe is going to come along here to see it?"

"I'll show you," Jerry said grinning. He hauled out the pieces of bark he had prepared so carefully. As Rru and Kalli soon saw, they were covered with messages asking for help and pointing out that three citizens of the Federation were marooned in the upper levels of the atmosphere of the planet below. The three of them soon attached some of the crystals to the pieces of bark and watched them slowly float away.

"Some of them," Jerry explained, "will reach the level used by spaceships passing through this system. By sending up as many as we have, we can be pretty sure that one of them will be spotted. All we have to do now is wait."

"Clever these Terrans," Kalli said to Rru.

"Oh, sure," Rru said sourly. "Any minute now we can expect a street car to round Sigma Cygni and pull up here under the belief that the raft is a passenger island. But with my luck, they won't let me on because I don't have a transfer."

Jerry and Kalli laughed.

"I suppose we'll have to make the best of it," Rru said. "Oh, well, space polo, anyone?"

"Remind me," Jerry said to Kalli, "if I ever get exiled again to leave Rru behind. He's too hard to please. In the meantime, let's make ourselves presentable."

Then they learned the reason he had insisted on such well-padded pillows on the raft. He pulled out a number of the larger skins and uncached a few dozen large thorns he'd hidden aboard. With these he soon fashioned crude, but adequate, costumes for them. Although it was to be noted that, possibly, with the crew of the hoped-for spaceship in mind, he was more concerned with the covering of Kalli than with Rru or himself.

For several days the three of them sat on the small raft in space. Below them the planet of Mallos was merely a large, colored ball, often completely obscured by clouds. Above them there was only the black void of deep space with the bright dots that were stars. It was a lost, lonely feeling.

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BY THE fifth day, the concentrates were getting low, but no lower than the spirits of the three occupants of the raft. Within twenty-four to forty-eight hours, they'd have to return to the ground. They could always try again later, but at the moment there was something about the prospect of one defeat which made future attempts seem hopeless. And if they had to return, the children of Mallos would make life pretty unbearable for them with their jests and jibes.

The afternoon of the fifth day they sat silently in the broiling rays of Sigma Cygni. They were so depressed that even Rru found no energy for his usual dry remarks. None of them knew how long the shadow had been shielding them from the M3 star before they noticed it. Kalli was the first to look up and her shout brought the heads of the other two up.

A big, scarred space freighter was nosing down toward them. The three of them leaped to their feet and started shouting and waving, even though they knew they couldn't be heard, and couldn't even be seen unless the ship was looking for them. If it wasn't looking for them, it would just go on by.

The freighter came within a few hundred feet of them and stopped. Then they knew that this was really a rescue.

A half hour was wasted while the ship tried to get them with a magnetic grappling plate. Since the raft was made entirely of wood, this was doomed from the start. Finally, the huge loading airlock hatch yawned open in invitation for them to enter. Jerry quickly shifted the crystals so that the raft moved over toward the freighter. It was ticklish business since he didn't dare have any crystals surfaced toward the ship or they would just as quickly move away from it. But after twenty minutes of maneuvering, he managed to float the raft into the airlock.

While the air pressure was adjusting in the airlock, Jerry worked at top speed to strip all of the crystals from the raft. He packed them into a small box he'd brought with him just for that purpose, placing them so that every stone was surfaced against another one. He had already experimented enough to know that this would nullify the power of the crystals. He had barely finished packing them in the box when the inner door opened.

The freighter was from Altair II and was staffed with Altairans except for one Terran. This suited Jerry's purpose perfectly, for Altairans are famous for their lack of curiosity. The sole Terran was an engine room officer and they saw him only once. Jerry's prepared explanation of running into a meteor shower with his private ship and barely making it to the planet below was accepted at face value. Although he had an answer for any questions about what had powered the raft, no one even asked him.

Part of the explanation had been assumed names for all of them and it had amused Jerry to give his own name as Eugene Dibble. He knew that the log of the space ship would have to be examined when it reached Terra and that the names of any persons rescued in space were always given on the official government videocast.

Before committing himself beyond the simple explanation of why they had been on the raft, Jerry managed to get an idea of the ship's route. Then he told the commander that they would like to be dropped at Capella. That, he reasoned, was far enough away from Rigil Kentaurus to give them a chance to organize themselves.

Shortly after the freighter was once more on her way, Jerry, Kalli and Rru sat in the officers' lounge. Kalli and Jerry were wearing clothes furnished by the commander and all three were enjoying cups of steaming Altairan *Ltezol* beer. While a stimulant, it was not alcohol, so Rru was also having some.

"Well, Rru," Jerry said, slipping an arm around Kalli's shoulders, "I told you we'd make it, didn't I?"

"Out of left field," said Rru. "If this is the way you're going to organize the battle against the Order of Holy Terra, I want to take back my introduction to you."

"Don't worry," Jerry said grandly. "All you and Kalli will have to do is fur-

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nish a little atmosphere for me. I expect to swing the whole thing by myself."

VIII

WHEN the freighter landed at the Choupa spaceport on Capella I, Jerry Ransom thanked the commander and he and his two companions slipped quickly away. Since Jerry and Kalli were wearing the clothes the commander had given them, and this alone might draw curious attention, they went directly to the Office of the Port of Entry. There they registered as natives of the planet Mallos in the system of Sigma Cygni. Kalli, under Jerry's prodding, spent most of her time pretending to admire all the wonderful things they had in this world.

Jerry had correctly guessed the result of registering as coming from an unexplored planet. The officials, all Capellan non-humans, at first were all disbelief. But once they accepted the fact that these apparent humans did come from an alien planet, they knocked themselves out. This was, of course, on order from the government. They were given all sorts of passes and credit cards and it was immediately arranged for them to be put up at the best hotel in Choupa. All at government expense.

Jerry had known what the official orders were in such cases. The Capellans were not allowed to carry out any examination of the visitors. As soon as the arrangements for them to be comfortable were completed, they'd notify Rigil Kentaurus. It would be at least two weeks before an official would be dispatched to Capella to examine them. Jerry expected to be gone before that. In the meantime, while they waited for Rru to get money from Antares, their expenses were no problem.

As two Capellan officials escorted them from the office, Jerry caught sight of Rru in the small crowd near the gates. He winked and indicated that Rru should follow. Since all Antareans looked alike to most Terrans, or other races, there was little chance that he would be challenged at all.

Once Jerry and Kalli were established in the Imperial Presidential suite at the hotel, and the escorts had left discreetly, Rru came up and joined them. Jerry ordered enough food sent up to the rooms so they could all eat and the three sat back to contemplate their future.

Once Jerry and Kalli managed to get regular clothes, they'd be able to move easily about the city, but in the meantime Rru would have to make arrangements to get money from Antares. This he could easily do through one of his many relatives. In addition to this, Rru was to find out about the Order of Holy Terra on Capella I.

That same night Rru sent off the spacegram to Antares. Early the following morning, he left the hotel and was gone all day. In the meantime, Jerry and Kalli used their credit cards to get clothes for both of them. Then, leaving Kalli at the hotel, Jerry went out on a shopping tour of his own. He returned heavily laden and spent the rest of the day shut up in one of the rooms. But that evening they were all together again.

RRU had also provided himself with clothing, but he had abandoned the sharp attire he had once affected. No more fancy sport jackets and two-tone slacks. Instead he wore a plain dark suit with only a faint pin stripe. His halo was a bright, clear green, indicating that he was feeling better than he had in a long time.

"You look like an undertaker," Jerry said when he saw the suit.

"Exactly the role I had in mind," Rru said promptly. "I'm thinking of specializing in Terrans. As my friend, you, of course, will be entitled to a special bargain, cut-rate price."

"I'll keep it in mind," Jerry said. "Now, what happened?"

"I received a spacegram order for fifty thousand credits," Rru said. "Not a large enough amount to arouse suspicion. In the meantime, Xxe Bomeri* has purchased a medium-class space yacht and is on his way here with five million

* Xxe Bomeri was the third partner in the Posterior Protectory.

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credits in cash. I thought this the best way of handling it, especially since I'm sure we'll need a ship and to buy or lease one here might lead to an investigation."

"Speaking of investigations," Kalli Malloon said, "what is the penalty for exiles returning to the Federation?"

"It all depends," Jerry said with a grin. "In the ordinary case, it's imprisonment on Jupiter. However, in the case of enemies of the State who have returned to agitate—and that's us, my love—the penalty is death by rocket blast."

"Asbestos overcoats will be worn," Rru said.

"I'm glad you thought of the ship," Jerry told Rru. "We'll need it—not only to get around the Federation, but I think we'll have to make one flying trip to Mallos."

"That reminds me," Rru said soberly. "I think you made a mistake registering you and Kalli as coming from Mallos."

"Why?"

"I refer you to Terran history," Rru said dryly. "Present company excepted, of course, but if Terrans get the idea that there's another inhabited planet, they'll be down on it like a swarm of meteors—and with about the same results. Before those poor characters know what's happening, they'll be eating Atomic Hot Dogs—ruining their indigestion—smoking Lucky Jet cigarettes and ruining their lungs, buying every piece of junk the Terrans can't sell anybody else, and they'll find themselves all dressed up with no place to go. Even though you and Kalli are going to vanish before the official gets here, the registry will be enough to send a few dozen warships blasting for Sigma Cygni to extend the well known Terran-hands-across-space."

"You're right, of course," Jerry admitted. "But I don't think it will happen in this case."

"Why?"

"Before the government can get around to it, I think there will be events which will keep them too busy."

"I hope so," Rru said. "I rather liked the children of Mallos. For humans, they aren't bad."

"Jerry," Kalli said, "do you still think they were descended from Terrans."

"I know they are," Jerry said firmly. "There were several unmistakeable clues, but I think I've got the whole answer. The children of Mallos are—" He broke off with an exclamation as he experienced a sharp, jabbing pain just under the left lapel of his coat*. "I'll tell you later," he finished lamely.

"Now," he went on, after rubbing his shoulder, "what did you learn about the Order of Holy Terra?"

"They're here," Rru said. "There are two Capellans wealthy enough to belong to the Order itself and two million Capellans have now joined the Amateurs. More are joining every day. You'll be interested, but not surprised I hope, to learn that it has already been ruled that Terran Amateurs are of a higher order than those who had the bad taste to be born as non-humans. Among the Terrans themselves there is some slight gradation, with the highest order being those who possess skin of that unhealthy pink shade usually called white. The rationale for this is that the color white indicates purity. Voice Dibble has set up a whole color chart which indicates character** and I'm told that this will also apply to judging us inferior citizens. Now, if I could only learn to turn my halo white."

* The jabbing pain came from a small button which Jerry Ransom wore in the lapel of his coat. The button was a symbol of membership in the Suspense Makers Union, Hitchcock Local, to which he had belonged since the days when he was a copy writer at DDE & No. It was obligatory for members to wear the button at all times when dressed. Each union button had a built-in, non-poisonous needle which jabbed the wearer whenever he was about to break the union rule that suspense must be maintained at all times and all cost.

**Voice Dibble's encyclical stated: White is the color of purity, therefore the white races are the essence of goodness and are to sit next to Truth itself, except in those cases where members of the white race do not admit the infallibility of the Order of Holy Terra where such refusal shall be accepted as proof that their blood has been contaminated by lustful contact with other races; Red is the color of shame, therefore the red races are said to live in isolation and shame, bowing their heads low before the messengers of Truth; Yellow is the color of cowardice, therefore the yellow races are known to be cowardly and given to stabbing in the back; Black is the color of sin, therefore the black races are given over to lusting after the sins of the flesh and the denial of Truth; Green is the color of illness, therefore the green races may be likened unto a racial cancer and are to be shunned; for it has been said that Truth abides only with purity and purity exists only in whiteness. By their skins ye shall know them, in Truth

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"All right," Jerry said grimly. "The next step is that the first thing tomorrow morning we all three go and join the Novitiates."

"What?" Rru and Kalli said together.

JERRY nodded. "We want to be able to wear the trappings of the Order," he said, "and the easiest way to get them is to join and buy them through the Order. I want us to have the robes, so we can be ready to leave the minute Xxe arrives."

"Jerry," Rru said hesitatingly, "I don't think I have to tell you that I have become fond of you and that I value your friendship. The fact that I no longer believe Terrans to be the wonderful creatures I once thought them to be has not changed my feeling about you as a person. Up to this point, I've followed your lead without question. But now I want to know something of what you plan. Despite our friendship, I cannot help otherwise. I will do nothing which does not promise to lead to something better for the non-human races of the galaxy."

Jerry grinned with affection at the Ancarean. "Going to be a reformer, Rru?" he asked. "Going to change the universe? It probably will earn you nothing but a boot right in your posterior protector."

"I'm aware of that," Rru said soberly. "I'm also aware of a new thought: it is better to die fighting for freedom than to live on my knees before the self-appointed lords of Terra."

"As much as you dislike them, a goodly number of Terrans have said almost the same thing," Jerry said. "All right, Rru, in the vernacular of our late, unlamented calling, I'll buy that. I can't tell you everything, because we have no way of knowing when a government spy-ray may be accidentally fixed on us. But I'll tell you this much. You and Kalli will have to do nothing but float around in the air while we make a fast tour of most of the planets in the Federation."

"Float in the air?" Kalli asked. "How?"

"The crystals of Mallos. I spent the afternoon making rings for all of us."

"What will you be doing on this tour?" Rru asked.

"Indulging in a slight falsehood," Jerry said. "As a higher echelon of the Holy Order—demonstrated by the fact that we can fly, which is more than even Voice Dibble can do—we will be a phenomenon even more exciting than their Holy Sphere. I will have only two things to say to the brethren. One is that all of those who are full members of the Order are deserving of ascension to the very throne of Truth and I will prophesy that this event will soon take place and that when it does the whole Truth will be revealed to everyone. The second thing will be to stress that two weeks from now is the beginning of the month of April, by the old Terran calendar, and that it was the month once set aside for a special festival in honor of an ancient Terran goddess named Terra. I will prophesy, in connection with this, that the government will declare a Terra Week and that all full members of the Order will spend that week on Rigil Kentaurus observing the sacred fertility rites."

"Why?"

"I promise you, Rru," Jerry said solemnly, "that when the festival on Rigil Kentaurus is over the Dibbles and the Imperial President will no longer exploit your people, or any others in the universe."

"They are bound to hear of our appearances," Rru said. "Even if we can keep out of their hands, they'll be suspicious enough to ignore any suggestion that comes from us."

Jerry shook his hand. "You're wrong. The Dibbles don't know it, but they have started something which controls them as much as they control it. While they don't believe any of the things they have ordered other people to believe, they must operate within the framework of that belief in order to hold their followers. If those followers accept me as a prophet—and I assure you they will—and come to believe that their religious leaders must hold the festival I prophesy, then it will have to be held. I'll bet my life on it—in fact, that's exactly what I'm going to do."

"Small loss," Rru muttered.

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IX

WITHIN two days Xxe Bomeri was at Capella I with a sleek spaceship. Rru, Jerry and Kalli, already dressed in the sombre robes of the Order of Holy Terra, went aboard as soon as it was dark, and the ship rose silently into the sky.

Their first stop, that same night, was at Capella II. The ship hovered in the air two miles above the major city, where close to a million Amateurs of the Order were meeting out in the open. Jerry, Rru and Kalli stepped through the airlock and floated downward.

The Amateurs had just finished their invocation to the Voice of the Holy Order when the three robed figures dropped out of the sky and stood ten feet over their heads. The Amateurs stared in awe for a full minute and then, as though operated by a single string, they dropped to the ground and pressed their heads to the ground.

"Brethren," Jerry said. His voice boomed out over the million Novitiates for he was wearing a miniature Magnisystem. "I am Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, who first came before the believers of Truth in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, in the thirteenth year of his reign. I am that Jeremiah who saw a rod of an almond tree and looked upon a seething pot and the face thereof was from the north, and I was appointed a prophet unto the nations. You may look among the records of the ancients and there you will find it writ how I spoke the Truth and all that I said came to pass. So it is again, even as it was in the days of Josiah as you may demand to read in the words of Jeremiah, and I am once more among you to speak the Truth and to prophesy that which is to come."

"Praise Dibble," the Amateurs cried as he paused.

"Now hear me and let it not depart from you," Jerry continued. "There are those among you who have so purified themselves that they are no more Amateurs, but have taken upon themselves the sacred right of a halo of righteousness and the wings of the blessed and they are so great in the eyes of Truth that there will soon come a day when they will ascend to sit with Truth and they will have no need of wings. And in that day the Truth will be revealed to all. I, Jeremiah, have prophesied this."

"Praise Dibble," they shouted again.

"Hear me again and let it not depart from you. Two weeks from today is the beginning of a festival of the ancients which was held in honor of Terra, even she who graces your order with her name. And it shall come to pass that the Imperial President shall declare a Terra week and that during that week all of those who have purified themselves so that they are no longer Amateurs will stay upon the planet Rigil Kentaurus and perform those rites which were dear to Terra. And it shall come to pass that all, Amateurs and those of the higher order alike, will thus be brought nearer to the Truth. I, Jeremiah, have prophesied this.

"Lift up your heads, Amateurs of Holy Terra, so that you may see even your prophet Jeremiah as he ascends."

The Amateurs looked up. Jerry, followed by Rru and Kalli, seemed to walk across the air just over their heads, then the three of them shot straight up into the air.

They caught two more meetings of Amateurs that night on other planets in Capella. Early the following day they were off to other systems. And everywhere, Jerry went through the same performance.

THEY soon found evidence that the Dibbles had heard of them. Once when they made an appearance in a huge tabernacle on Fomalhaut II, one of the Amateurs shouted excitedly after Jerry as he was about to leave.

"Yes, brother?" Jerry asked, halting his flight.

"Voice Dibble," the Novitiate announced, almost overcome by the importance of carrying a message between the two, "has just called on the videophone and would speak with the prophet Jeremiah."

"The trappings of man are not for the

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prophet Jeremiah," Jerry said. "I will appear among the appointed of Truth on the first day of the fesival on Rigil Kentaurus."

He nodded to his two companions and they swept out through one of the great windows in the roof of the tabernacle.

"Dibble's getting worried," he said to the other when they were discussing it later.

"That's the point," Rru said worriedly. "It seems to me that you're taking too big a chance. The Dibbles are going to know that this is somebody trying to cut in on them. If they don't know it, the Imperial President certainly will. They'll know that doing anything you predict will be playing into your hands."

"They'll suspect it all right," Jerry said. "But don't worry, they'll go through with it. They already put out a feeler about not going through with it. The results will convince them that they have to."

"How do you know?" Kalli asked.

"On the newscast this morning while you two were still sleeping," Jerry said. "They tried the feeler on Capella II. There was an announcement that the festival on Rigil Kentaurus might have to be postponed. One million workers left their jobs to pray. The loss was one million man hours. No, they'll have the festival. Also, now they'll believe they have a chance to catch the prophet Jeremiah." He chuckled.

"Darling, you're not really going to be there, are you?" Kalli asked.

"I certainly am," Jerry said. "I wouldn't miss seeing the faces of the Dibbles and my wife for anything in the universe. Don't worry, honey—I'll be all right."

There were other evidences that the Dibbles were agitated. There were rumors of Patrolmen, who also belonged to the Order, suddenly dropping in on various groups of Amateurs at random. Apparently, they hoped to be present when the prophet appeared.

Other rumors were also spreading with the speed of light. By the third day, they found that many Amateurs already knew all about them and were eagerly waiting their appearance. A mass fervor was building up just as Jerry had known it would.

o

AFTER a week of working night and day, Jerry felt that they had covered enough of the Federation. Leaving Rru and Kalli safely hidden on Antares, he took off for Sigma Cygni.

Four days later, looking exhausted, he was back. On the way, he had picked up a dozen Amateurs, all Terrans. Without making any explanation to Rru or Kalli, he took off again. It was only three days before the festival.

Jerry had already checked and knew that both the Dibbles and Imperial President Carsons were on Ganymede. He also knew that under no circumstances, short of an attack by an alien power, were government officials to be contacted while they were on Ganymede. This left Federation matters in the hands of Daniels, the Coadjutor-President. Since Carsons was not one to have an assistant capable of planning to take his place, Daniels was not noted for his brilliance. Jerry had taken all of this into consideration.

The ship came down at the spaceport on Rigil Kentaurus and the thirteen blue-robed Amateurs stepped out. They wheeled with them a portable atomic drilling machine. There was a small trailer behind it, loaded with bags. They marched directly to the Patrol building at the edge of the spaceport. They were met there by a sub-commander.

"Brother," Jerry said solemnly, "we are here for the Ceremony of Purification."

"The what?" the sub-commander said.

"The Ceremony of Purification," Jerry repeated. "Is the Patrol Squad ready to accompany us?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" the officer demanded. He had expected to spend the afternoon napping and he didn't welcome things he didn't understand.

"In the name of Holy Terra," Jerry said calmly, "our beloved Voice Dibble arranged with the Imperial President for us to be escorted by Patrolmen while we perform the Ceremony of Purification

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over the planet of Rigil Kentaurus."

"I don't know anything about it," the sub-commander said truthfully.

"Then call the Imperial President."

"He's away."

"Then call the Coadjutor-President," Jerry said. "Good Terra, man, the festival is only three days off."

Grumbling to himself, the sub-commander went back to his office and called the Coadjutor-President. The latter knew nothing about it either. But he had no desire to incur the wrath of his superior, and he wanted to get back to the new secretary he was interviewing, so he told the sub-commander to supply the escort. The sub-commander quickly routed out some of his men and handed them the assignment. Then he went to work on his delayed nap.

While the patrolmen watched in boredom, Jerry Ransom and his dozen helpers went to work, first at the very edge of the spaceport. They drilled a narrow hole some ten feet into the ground, dropped in a brightly colored stone. They carefully refilled the hole and resodded it.

Making short jumps in the space ship, they kept repeating the operation every few hundred miles. By night they were back at the spaceport, but the patrolmen soon discovered the job was not finished. They struck off at another angle, repeating the operation. Altogether, they made four complete trips around the planet, finishing shortly before noon the following day. The groggy patrolmen watched them blast off with considerable pleasure.

Making a short stop on Terra, Jerry dropped off his twelve assistants after giving each of them explicit instructions and a huge sum of money. Then he flew on to Antares where he slept around the clock.

The night before the festival was to begin, the space ship again took off from Antares. This time Rru Photinus was at the controls, but Jerry was the sole passenger.

X

IT WAS still early in the morning on the first festival day when the spaceships began to arrive on Rigil Kentaurus, bringing the richest inhabitants of the galaxy. Among them were most of the important government officials from the various star systems. Many of the wealthy males brought their wives, while others brought their loves of the moment. As usual, Thwai Thwee brought his three companions. All of them wore their robes with wings and halos.

While there could be no videocast of the festival, there was a broadcast of the arrivals. Once they were all there, the camera would withdraw into space where it would continue to focus on the spinning globe of Rigil Kentaurus. It had been arranged that at various intervals giant fireworks would be fired from the planet. These would spell out a variety of religious axioms for the Amateurs who would be watching the videocast. But even if there would be nothing to see but the spinning globe, there would be billions of eyes glued to the screens of their videofurniture. The prophet Jeremiah had told them that the festival would bring all of them closer to the Truth.

The streets of the capital city of Rigil Kentaurus were filled with winged visitors hurrying toward the Presidential Palace. Almost everyone on the planet that day was in a happy state, looking forward to the week-long orgy. The only exceptions were the Imperial President, Erwin Dibble, Eugene Dibble, and Eugene's wife, the former Alice Denning Ransom.

They had learned of the Ceremony of Purification as soon as they had returned from Ganymede. Their first fear had been that the entire planet was mined with explosives. The patrolmen had been questioned, but they couldn't remember any of the exact spots where the digging had been done. It was out of the question to start digging up half the planet. They had, however, covered the planet with a Robot Analyzer. The report, which they had to accept as accurate, stated that there were no explosives of any known kind beneath the surface of the planet, nor were there any strange metals.

But they were still worried—mostly because they couldn't think of any logical

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reason for anyone to run around digging holes in the planet. It was Erwin Dibble's opinion that the prophet Jeremiah was simply a crackpot who had learned some new method of hypnosis so that the masses thought he could fly.

If he were right, Erwin argued, then you could expect anything from a crackpot, even to the senseless digging of holes. If the crackpot only showed up at the festival as he had promised, they could quietly execute him and explain that he had gone on to the higher Truth. Although the others weren't so sure that they were dealing with a crackpot, they were in agreement that he had to be caught. Half of the Federation war fleet was on Rigil Kentaurus. Hundreds of patrolmen were at the spaceport, carefully screening all arrivals. Others, in the garb of the Order, mingled with those making their way toward the Presidential Palace.

Despite this precaution, one of the robed visitors already walking toward the palace was Jerry Ransom.

The night before he had stepped through the airlock high above the planet and silently drifted down. He was wearing white wings and a golden halo burned over his head.

THE Presidential Palace was easily large enough to hold the seven thousand members of the Order of Holy Terra and all of them were heading there.

There were a hundred banquet halls filled with food and drink and servants were busily carrying things to the fifty patios for those who wanted to remain outdoors. The presidential party, numbering about a hundred and including the Dibbles, was out in the Imperial Patio. They were drinking and watching a battle of giant Enifian swans on the Synod Sea. Jerry Ransom had no trouble approaching the Imperial Patio and he soon found a chance to slip inside without being noticed. He kept quietly in the background and watched the time.

He was about ready to move when something happened to set the stage for him. A fat minister, looking ridiculous with wings and a halo, rushed into the patio and crowded up to the Imperial President.

"Sir President," he said, and it was obvious that he was frightened, "he must be here."

"Who's here?" the president demanded.

"This—Jeremiah."

"How can you tell?" Erwin Dibble wanted to know.

"The Palace Tabulator. We recently adjusted it so that it could register the impressions of halos and so count them. There are only seven thousand of us, yet the tabulator registers seven thousand and one halos within the palace walls."

There was a moment of startled silence. "If he's here," the President said firmly, "we'll soon find him."

"Sooner than you think," Jerry said loudly and stepped forward.

Alice Denning Ransom Dibble was the first to recognize him. "Jerry," she exclaimed.

"Well," Eugene Dibble said, with a nasty smile on his face, "so you're the prophet Jeremiah? You know, I had an idea you might be. I suppose you're aware of the penalty for defying an executive order of exile?"

"Fully," said Jerry with a smile.

The Imperial President had recovered from his first stunned reaction to Jerry's appearance. He flung up his arm and his voice roared out over the patio. "Guards, arrest that man."

Several guards dashed forward. Just as it seemed that their hands were about to close on him, he shot up into the air and stood five feet over their heads.

"A very pretty trick," said the president, unimpressed—although the same could not be said for everyone in the patio. "I suppose you've discovered some sort of miniature motor. I doubt, however, if it can carry you faster than the charge of an energy gun. Guards!"

The guards reached for their weapons.

"Wait," Jerry thundered. So strong was his personality that the guards hesitated. It was as much a delay as Jerry expected or wanted. The time was at

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hand. "I would show you still another miracle," he continued. He flung his arm out in the direction of the spaceport. "Look."

Involuntarily, they all turned to look in the direction he pointed.

"It's a trick," Erwin Dibble said hoarsely. "I don't see—" He broke off for suddenly he did see something. The sky above the spaceport was suddenly black with ships as thousands of spaceships rose in the air together.

EVEN from that distance it was obvious that they were unmanned. They were bunched too closely together and their method of flight suggested that it was without benefit of motors.

"Our ships," Eugene Dibble exclaimed. He turned to look at Jerry and there was fear in his eyes. "Why?"

"There is a prophecy to be fulfilled," Jerry said. "All of you have considered yourselves too good for the rest of the galaxy, have shown a constant desire to get away from it all. Well, I'm making it possible for you. This is your elevation and hereafter you will find yourselves beyond the touch of the masses."

Jerry, even though he was not standing on the ground, noticed the slight tug that quivered the whole planet, although the others were too excited to notice it.

The Imperial President, however, was made of hardier stuff than the Dibbles. "Bah," he said. "The Patrol will come and rescue us. Guards, kill that man."

Again, the guards reached for their guns, but their hands were shaking so badly they had trouble drawing them. And they stopped at the first sound of Jerry's voice.

"Look," he cried. "Look at the sun of Rigil Kentaurus."

They looked and it was immediately apparent that the sun was farther away than it had been a few minutes before. Even as they watched, they saw it dwindle.

Others throughout the palace must have seen it too, for suddenly there was a great wailing sound as though thousands of cries were being ripped from their throats.

Jerry Ransom rose higher in the air and none saw him go except Alice Dibble.

"Jerry," she called after him, "take me with you. You know I never cared for anyone but you. Jerry—"

Her voice receded as he arrowed straight up above the palace. Far up, where the atmosphere thinned, there waited a single spaceship. Jerry Ransom slipped in through the open airlock. A moment later he was inside the ship. The pilot, one of the twelve Terrans who had helped him with the Ceremony of Purification, gave him a grin and sent the ship darting away from the planet.

Back on Antares I, Rru Photinus and Kalli Malloon were waiting in the house when Jerry walked through the door. Their faces showed the signs of strain. Kalli gave a little cry and ran to him. Jerry put his arms around her and held her tightly.

"Jerry," she said against his chest, "we saw it on the videocast. It was horrible, seeing the planet speeding away from its sun and knowing that you were probably on it."

"Nonsense," Jerry told her, patting her shoulder. "I told you there was nothing to worry about."

"It was a very impressive show," Rru said, as Jerry led Kalli to a big double chair. "As you might gather, there is some excitement around the galaxy. One newscaster has already mentioned that the prophet Jeremiah predicted that the members of the Order would elevate. There are reports that the Amateurs are going wild all over the galaxy. So far, no one has gotten around to realizing that there is no Federation government at the moment."

"They will soon enough," Jerry said. He ran his hand wearily through his hair and grinned at them. "One of the first things to do is get word to all the Amateurs from the prophet Jeremiah that they are to keep order until elections can be held."

"*The* first thing," Rru said firmly, "is to give us an explanation I can guess that the crystals of Mallos are involved somehow, but how were you

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able to control them?"

"I went to Mallos," Jerry said, "and got crystals which weren't quite finished growing. They have practically no effect on gravity until they are fully grown and the ones I got weren't fully grown until today. I found a dozen Terrans who were willing to take orders without asking any questions. With their help, I planted crystals all over the planet of Rigil Kentaurus, all of them with their surfaces pointing outward. The same men also planted crystals on every space ship that today went to Rigil Kentaurus. Those had their surfaces pointing downward.

"Today, when the crystals were fully mature, their power suddenly came on. Every ship on the planet suddenly left it. A moment later, the planted crystals forced the planet out of its orbit and away from its sun. As long as they are there, they will not permit that planet to be attracted to any other heavenly body. So the planet and its inhabitants are due to wander throughout the galaxy, never again becoming part of any system."

"There may be people still loyal to them," Rru said. "Why can't they take the remaining war ships and rescue them?"

"What remaining war ships?" Jerry asked with a grin. "Crystals were planted on every war ship in the Federation. They're all out in space now. Anyway, it's doubtful if a ship could land on the planet now. In fact, even the people there will probably weigh only about thirty pounds in terms of the old gravity pull. But they'll soon get used to it."

Kalli shuddered. "I have no sympathy for those who went to the planet today," she said, "but, Jerry, what about all the workers and servants trapped on the planet. They'll all die."

"No, they won't," Jerry said.

"Why not? They'll have no sunlight, they won't be able to grow anything."

"No, honey. The planet will carry its atmosphere along with it. Rigil Kentaurus had the largest and most efficient atomic plant in the galaxy. They'll be able to heat the planet artificially for a long time—at least a couple hundred years. So they can keep warm and grow food. They are completely self sufficient. Maybe some day we can rescue their descendants."

She moved closer to him. "I feel better about it then," she said. She was silent a minute, then said: "Jerry, can we get married now and go off somewhere and just live quietly?"

"We can get married," he said, "but we can't go off just yet. The prophet Jeremiah has to make one more whistle-stop tour."

XI

IT WAS six months later and the first free Federation election in more than two centuries had been held. The constitution of the Federation had been overhauled and Terra's representation in the Galactic Synod was exactly the same as the eighty-six other planets in the Federation, instead of four-fifths as it had always been in the past. The same applied to business. Terran business men had their share of the industries, but not more.

It was five months since the election had been held and everyone seemed more than pleased with the administrative ability of President Rru Photinus. Antares had been admitted to the Federation barely in time for the election by a popular demand. It had been necessary in order to fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah.

The Order of Holy Terra still existed, but gone were the trappings of robes, halos and wings. The only reminder of its beginning was the fact that there were now seven thousand saints—each one of the members who had been on Rigil Kentaurus had been sainted. But this made for so many saints that almost everyone had trouble remembering the names of any of them, even those of the two Dibbles.

One of the first laws of the new government was that the Holy Order could exist as a religious body. It was obvious that it had exerted too great a pressure

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on the imaginations of millions for it to be suddenly outlawed. But the literature put out by the Dibbles had been replaced by new copies of old Terran literature in which the original prophet Jeremiah appeared. And it was expressly forbidden for any government official to give allegiance to the religious order.

In the meantime, in his home on a deserted section of Antares I, a rather handsome young man labored to finish a monograph which was to prove that the humans of the planet Mallos, in Sigma Cygni, were descended from a man and two women who had left Terra in 1593 in some sort of crude space ship. He had no information to give about the method of travel, but there were many clues to the rest and he had woven an interesting story which was to intrigue Federation scientists for years. Calm, dignified scientists were to almost come to blows over the question of whether Christopher Marlowe* had been killed in a tavern room in London or gone to found a new race of men on a planet four hundred and sixty-five light years away.

The man had just finished the manuscript and was admiring the logic of the final page, when the door of his study opened and a beautiful young woman entered.

"Jerry," she said.

"Yes?" he answered, still going over the paragraph where he quoted an ancient writer named Shakespeare concerning the "great reckoning in a little room."

"What do you think you'd like to name a son?" she asked.

"A son?" he repeated absent-mindedly, still reading. "I think perhaps Rrupert, in honor of our friend the president."

"Rrupert?" She thought about the name for a moment, then nodded. "I like it," she said. "We'll do it."

Only then did the full impact of the question strike him. He did a doubletake, looking up at his wife.

"Kalli," he said.

"Yes?" she returned absent-mindedly. She was still thinking about the name.

"Did you say a son? You did, didn't you?"

"I did," she said firmly. "At least, that's what the doctor said it will be."

Jerry Ransom got hastily to his feet, the manuscript sliding to the floor where it was momentarily forgotten. He pulled her into his arms and kissed her. Her mouth was as fresh and inviting as it had been that night in Sigma Cygni.

The wind continued to ruffle the pages of the monograph long after they had gone into the next room. It was the glorious 31st Century, in the first year of the administration of President Rru Photinus, but the ways of a man and a maid had changed not a whit.

* It is impossible, of course, to reprint the monograph here in its entirety, but Jerry Ransom's first clue was that the children of Mallos sang Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love," one of the great love poems of ancient Terra. There were four word changes in it and one stanza had been dropped out, but it was still the Marlowe poem. The other song he'd heard on that planet—although he'd heard only one verse of it—was "O Mistress Mine" which was first published in London in 1590. Ransom, of course, claimed that the name Mallos was merely Marlowe's as it had become corrupted through fifteen centuries. In other words, the race there were Marlowe's children and the planet was also Marlowe's. Although it carried little real weight, Ransom gave a quote from Marlowe's last play to show that he had something of the sort in mind. The quote was: "I'll be great Emperor of the world,/And make a bridge through the moving air," which Marlowe put in the mouth of Doctor Faustus. Ransom also dug up some old records to show that Marlowe had been in serious trouble at the time of his supposed "death" and had plenty of reason to run away. He pointed up the fact that the only proof history offered of Marlowe's death was the confession of the man who claimed to have murdered him, a rather unreliable ruffian of the day whose very name is not certain.

Featured Next Month

THE CONDITIONED CAPTAIN

A Novel of a Wild Flight Around the Universe!

By FLETCHER PRATT

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"Dead," said the Captain. "You will hold yourself for a Board of Inquiry."

EARTH is the evening star

By ROBERT SHERMAN TOWNES

They got the key to the dead city of Mars from a race no longer there . . .

O'MALLEY came weaving into the spaceship's Control Center, amiably prepared for one of Captain Bronck's famous tongue lashings. But nobody paid any attention to him. The Captain, flanked by his two top aides, was staring at the big V-screen which

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served as the ship's window.

O'Malley was disappointed. After all, this was a great moment in history, this first landing on the planet Mars, and for the expedition's official historian to be sozzled was a serious matter. Or so it seemed to O'Malley that it ought to be. Even from the back it could be seen that the three men were puzzled—even suspicious of—whatever they saw in the V-screen. Without turning around, Captain Bronck murmured drily,

"Still able to stand up, Mr. O'Malley? Better than I had dared hope." The Captain's voice was oddly neat and delicate for such a massive man.

"How'd ya know 't was me?" Perversely, O'Malley made his voice much thicker than need be.

"You have a certain aura about you, Mr. O'Malley. Always. In fact that potent breath may give you trouble shortly when you're locked up in an airsuit alone with it."

Still the Captain had not turned from his scrutiny of the screen. Halsman, the ramrod-stiff, slender and facelessly correct third in command stepped disdainfully aside so O'Malley could see the screen. After all, his expression made clear, even a drunken historian must do his duty as assigned. O'Malley put one hand on Captain Bronck's thickly-muscled arm and peered at the wavering image on the glass plate. He whistled.

"I had one of those as a kid. It played music."

"I see what you mean," said Bronck, "but that little toy is about six kilometers around and two across. It is, believe it or not, a city."

Cooper, the bitter-faced second in command, was clucking disapprovingly. O'Malley could not tell whether it was because of the flippant architecture or—the banner. O'Malley's hand touched the tall glass case that stood near the Captain's metal control chair. He couldn't resist an impish grin at Bronck. In the case stood a huge stiff banner; on a gold-plated staff, no less. O'Malley knew how Captain Bronck had yearned forward to that great scene. The grinding cameras, the crewmen lined up in mathematically perfect ranks, the terse, potent, unforgettable speech and Captain Bronck, wide-legged stance and upflung head, thrusting the gilten pole into the red soil of Mars.

O'Malley's grin faded, his eyes softened. Well, it wasn't all just military *blague*. Bronck had his own cause. Back home no-one gave this first space ship, the *Alliance*, much chance of ever getting to Mars, and practically none of getting home again. Every man-jack of the twenty crewmen was coolly labelled "expendable." All were slightly damaged in one way or another. O'Malley was an impertinent lush. Bronck had been to the Moon and lost his left arm, leg and eye there. Earth, divided into two monolithic warring states, wasted nothing. For Bronck that stiff banner in its glass case represented a triumph most particularly his own.

Round and round the planet Bronck had cautiously reconnoitered. Everywhere nothing but dried-up red bogs, enormous canals with a pitiful seeping of moisture from the polar ice caps, and at the canal junctures great ruined cities as dead as Angkor Wat. Not, however, dead in dignity like Angkor. Slashed, flattened, scattered and melted—the hand of war was as unmistakable here as at home. All life, so it had seemed, had long ago perished.

BUT NOW, picked up in perfect detail by the television cameras mounted on nacelles outside the silver hull of the ship, they saw a city in spic-and-span condition. But such a city—really, thought O'Malley, what kind of jackanapes playboys ever built this thing. It was perfectly circular, with a wall and a roof with a space between them—just like a child's carousel. One almost expected to hear the tinkly music. The wall was bright pink and was cut into swooping catenary curves; each of the high peaks thus made was surmounted by a jewel-like faceted globe. The closed gate stood well over four hundred feet high, its unmatched side towers rising twice the height of the gaudily decorated roof.

"Ridiculous," snorted Bronck. "To-

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tally undefensible."

"Maybe around these parts cities don't need defending any more," suggested O'Malley. Captain Bronck ignored such an absurd idea. Attack. Defense. Are these not the laws of the Universe? Of course they were. O'Malley flashed a mocking smile at the Captain. He had stopped feeling sorry for him. One always did.

"Well, Captain, what about the banner, now? Maybe these folks have a nice flag of their own."

Captain Bronck looked him full in the face. His small black eyes were cold but there was a probing intelligence in them that almost illuminated his heavy features.

"I often wonder, Mr. O'Malley," the Captain purred in his oddly delicate voice, "if you would dare these little bull-baiting adventures if you were in uniform."

"I'd probably not dare. But I'd end up getting potted enough to do it, anyway." He smiled jovially.

"I dare say. Well. Well. As for the flag, just for your records—you *are* keeping records, I trust—Operation Red Planet is fully prepared with many contingent plans including one for the possibility of meeting surviving sentient life here, remote as that possibility seemed to Central Command."

Central Command! The words fell like ice on O'Malley's tipsy-rosy mind. Central Command. The new kind of government. CENCOM that had replaced the sloppy, brawling, inefficient governments of civilians. In the long decades of cold war between the Alliance of Truth and the Partisans of Peace, all personal liberties had become irrelevant. From birth to death the citizen moved only to stimuli of CENCOM. Everywhere on the paved and glassy surfaces of the Earth there was perfect discipline and underneath there was sullen anarchy of the heart.

Halsman snapped to attention as Executive Officer Cooper smartly saluted Captain Bronck.

"Does the Captain wish the ship brought down in accordance with Plan Seven?" droned Cooper.

"So," snapped Bronck and everybody saluted again. To his own annoyance the Captain found himself explaining his order to O'Malley.

"CENCOM's Plan Seven covers our finding civilized life. We make no possessive gesture (he looked wistfully at the banner), bear nothing that even looks like arms, come down in plain sight—if there be no overt hostile moves here—and step out of the ship as friendly envoys."

"Trying frantically," added O'Malley, "to look as honest as our Earthman faces will allow."

"So." Captain Bronck's "so" was famous throughout the Armed Wing (ARWIN) and was perhaps the most exact sound in existence, second only to the one beep of the Central Time Signal.

HALSMAN and Cooper, with expressionless eyes, swung the long vessel into landing posture. Bronck brought her down with one of his famous apartment house elevator landings. The *Alliance* rested, needle-nose upward, on the red sands half a mile from the city for the prescribed 12 hours. When no move was made by the little city, they prepared to disembark the "friendly envoys" who might well be merely archeologists.

Captain Bronck decided that the landing party would use the outside equipment lift rather than the slender ladders. More dignified—what with their various infirmities. Those to comprise the first party of men ever to set foot on another planet had been selected by Wing Screen Command (WISCO). No poetry had been involved in the decision.

Captain Bronck, Historian O'Malley, Biologist Vollmer, Halsman and Trooper Fifth Class Prince. The last as a sort of bodyguard. Vollmer's was not the most important scientific rating. The geologists mattered most. The *Alliance* was looking for "critical" ores to help tip the balance in the everlasting cold war. Under Plan Seven, the ostentatious lack of arms was understood to permit a small pistol up the sleeve of the

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air suit, reachable by a handy zipper.

Captain Bronck dressed in his best uniform and wore *all* his medals. He hadn't meant to look at O'Malley for approval, but he did. O'Malley winked raffishly and assured the Captain, "You look luscious enough to eat."

Bronck snorted. That was the best way with sassy writers. A snort. Say anything hasty and the writer would somehow slip it into print past the censors and make you look a perfect ass. O'Malley had an especially bad name for that sort of thing.

The five men, cased in bulky but free-moving air suits and plastic fishbowl helmets, passed through the complex of airlocks and stepped onto the outside lift. O'Malley felt his pulse racing. Bronck's black eyes were hard with victory. Halsman and Prince were expressionless; erect as lead soldiers, they never took their eyes off the toytown ramparts across the red plain. Vollmer, the diminutive biologist, hopped about like a chipmunk. He had a little spoon for scooping up samples of the dust that lay motionless everywhere on the planet—except, apparently, in the musicbox city.

The padded supports of the lift struck with a soft bump and settled in the dust. None of the men moved. Even Vollmer had to wait for the Captain to step down first. Bronck looked at O'Malley and smiled the best smile he knew how. He wanted to find in the eyes of the drunken, mocking writer some little gleam of "well done." It was not there. Only hatred. Shocking, blasting hatred poured from the usually twinkly blue eyes. Then tears began to form. O'Malley turned away.

This moment had been the dream of ages, of great men and little boys alike. Red Mars had floated like a high challenge in the skies of home. And men had come. But not a-roving. They were only a military detail grubbing for ores. The new dream was only this—survive.

Captain Bronck waited another imperceptible moment, and stepped off the lift onto the red soil of Mars. His voice was flat and tight in the intercom, "1709 hours, Greenwich time."

Halsman and Prince stepped into the red dust and stood stiffly at attention. O'Malley could hear anthems banging away inside their heads. Vollmer scuttled about, filling his numbered vials with what looked like red baby powder. Although he was irritated at the clumsiness of his delicate fingers in the thick gloves, delighted little chirping noises came along the intercom from him.

Halsman spoke,

"I don't like it, Captain. That city is in perfect shape. Clean as a new jet wing. And not a sign yet. Nothing."

CAPTAIN BRONCK nodded his massive head in the helmet. It was not a comfortable thing to do, but the old habits persisted. His voice was slower than usual.

"The ship is covering us. For whatever that may be worth. They'll take off the second anything peculiar happens. Cooper knows what to do."

Bronck was thinking, O'Malley suddenly realised, not of them but of his ship. Scratch a skipper, find a skipper. All the way to the core.

"What about those patches of gray?" Halsman asked Vollmer in the abrupt tones he always used on non-military personnel. "Disease of some sort?"

Volmer squinted, marvellously clear though the attenuated air was, at the airy-fairy towers and domes, here and there disfigured with a patch of gray.

"No-o-o," he began. Vollmer hated direct question and his speech was always rich with footnotes. "No-o-o. I think they might be merely spots of color outside the range of human perception. As you know, the human eye is not. . . ."

"So." snapped Bronck. He never read footnotes. "Nothing harmful, then."

Still, even when they were no more than a few hundred yards from the city, there was no sign of life. No crowds, no peeping at these impossible visitors. Or was there peeping? Halsman put it into words.

"There may be thousands of eyes—or whatever they have for eyes here—watching from behind those silly windows."

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Silly windows. O'Malley nodded. So, even the robotical Halsman felt it. After allowing for different standards of taste when you had traveléld so far from home, there was still a quality of empty-headedness about the buildings. The houses, each like a tiny palace made of colored paper, stood every whichway. Spiraled towers rose on unmatched stilts and tapered off to utterly absurd needle points. Unneccesary bridges spanned harlequin-patterned, tiled avenues that swept grandly out from a central plaza and ran smack up against the pink wall before they had a chance to get up steam.

Bronck growled, "Whole damned place looks like a kid's fairy story illustration."

O'Malley wondered if there was something wistful in the Captain's voice. He decided it was no use looking for that sort of swampfire in a concrete age. The whole world was Bronck nowadays. No use calling the Captain a boor, a robot, he was the norm of the day. Against his clear simple mind others were matched by great electronic machines. The O'Malleys were suspect, maladjusted, outrageous. Looking at the pink icing city, O'Malley was wrenched with a homesickness for the Earth that had vanished before he was born.

With an imperious nod of his head, Captain Bronck stepped forward and walked toward the pink wall. Alone in a world men had never before seen, armed with a pistol that could only spit and scratch, Captain Bronck advanced on the city as though armies and nations marched behind him. O'Malley had drunk himself silly many a fine evening hating the frozen system that made troopers out of babies and girls. Now, suddenly, he felt tinglingly close to Bronck. They were, taken all in all, one kind, all kin in the pride and stupidity and bravery of the breed.

When they reached the great closed gate, Vollmer had to be reminded of his manners; he wanted to carve off a sample of the plastic-like pink material. The gate was covered with delicately etched geometric patterns. Vollmer was jubilant. Circles, triangles, hexagons—thought processes a human could understand.

Like all the grandiose gates back home, thrown up in sheer exuberance over authority, this one had a small real door cut into the mighty portal.

"Not five feet high. Little blighters, anyway," said Bronck.

"See that oval handle," chirped Vollmer, "made for a flexible, flattish member operating at about the height of a man's waist. The narrowness of the oval suggests a very small . . ."

Bronck, for once, would have been willing to hear Vollmer out to the end. This came under the heading of Military Intelligence, but Vollmer's one-chance to finish a sentence died before the soft slipping sound that came over their sensitive earphones. The great door began to slide open. It slid on smooth runners into the right-hand side of the pink wall. "To the right"—Bronck made the mental note. Directly ahead of the five men spread a wide avenue made up of shiny tiles, no two the same color and arranged, as far as human eyes could make out, in no pattern whatsoever. O'Malley tried squinting up his eyes to look at it. That way, it looked better.

"You know, it's really quite beautiful," he said to nobody in particular.

"So is the lip of a flycatching flower!" snapped Halsman.

Bronck nodded, then shrugged.

"You're both right. But no matter. We stand at fullest disadvantage, anyway. We knew that when we committed ourselves to the terrain." O'Malley swung back to hating the Captain. Little boy's dream of alien stars—Mars, the Red—Mystery, was "terrain." He covered up sentiment, as always, with busy lip, "Well, let's go in. Might as well take the plunge. Last one in is a rotten egg."

Captain Bronck smiled frostily. Proctocol would settle who was first and who was last. He strode forward. He felt the gay tile give slightly under his good foot, but it didn't cut his stride. Prince jumped when he stepped on a tile that recessed. Bronck snapped him to order. No diving for weapons, not even for cameras. Remember those other cities—

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these might be the lads who won.

WHEN they were all within the gate —which did not slam shut as they half suspected it might—a riot broke loose. Music, loud, raucous tooting, scraping and banging reverberated from every side. Vividly colored banners swooped down the fronts of the tinted buildings. Gaudy bunting waved from poles atop the towers—moved in ripples by jets of air from tiny holes in the staffs. This made the little squiggly abstractions on them seem to dance. Every so often a note of the music cut the ear like a knife; some notes were inaudible. It was like the "Aida" Triumphal March played on washtubs, penny whistles and Theremins.

But no living thing moved in the streets. No faces, however bizarre or horrid, appeared in the many windows. Only the frantically jubilant flags and the crashing music.

"All right! All right!" Halsman's voice was cracked. "It's a great welcome, but where the hell is everybody!" His eyes were too bright. Captain Bronck was about to snap at him when O'Malley broke the tension by chanting in a childish singsong, "Come out, come out, wherever you are."

The corners of Bronck's mouth relaxed a millimeter. But Halsman's cheekbones were flushed dark red. He had lost face in his leader's presence.

They all discovered it at once—about the music. It had a definite form. The ending had already been played twice over.

"Record jammed," Prince giggled nervously.

"I wonder *when* the record was put on," said Vollmer slowly. They all remembered the section of pavement that gave under their feet. Vollmer pointed eagerly to a small flight of stairs leading into a zig-zag painted building.

"Steps! Anthropomorphous life. Only a biped would evolve steps like that. Out in the bogs, forests. Here in the city, steps. Hands, feet, a straight spine. Nature determines the form of life but the form of life determines the—"

"What now, sir?" Halsman broke in.

"We proceed along this main avenue to the rest of this gimcrack town and try to find the center of command."

Oh, poor Bronck, sighed O'Malley to himself, go forth and find death and horror and all terrible things, but be happy so long as there is a visible center of command.

Aloud, he said simply, "Lead on, Captain. Your gallant little band follows whithersoever." He managed to get quite a degree of low comedy into the last word. Bronck snorted and set forward. As they paced the empty avenue, followed everywhere by the repeating Entry March, Halsman and Prince looked about in cold alertness. O'Malley was beginning to find the town less charming than he had at first thought it. Under the technical brilliance of the engineering lay an uneasy weakness. The designs throughout showed a tittering inanity. There were hundred-foot arches hung with crystal pendants and what looked like iron cubes. One spiraling cat's-cradle of silvery girders puzzled everybody until Prince identified it. The huge thing was nothing but a play slide. O'Malley thought of those jolly bums of the forest, the otters, and their snow slides. Nowhere was there anything to suggest working or fighting or even, for that matter, love.

IN THE very center of this heartless toy there lay a broad plaza, floored in shimmering gray. O'Malley would have liked to be able to perceive that color. In the center of a carven bowl of what looked like blue alabaster, stood an artificial tree whose leaves and blossoms were cut of gems. Somehow one knew they were gems, here. No water bubbled, but the little holes were there and the bowl as clean and dustless as a floor about to be inspected by Captain Bronck.

Benches ringed the fountain. People—O'Malley did not much like little Vollmer's "sentient, anthropomorphous organisms"—people had strolled here, sat here, dabbed small hands in the waters. And they had seen the waters trickle away and vanish.

"What's that?" Halsman's voice bris-

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tled with suspicion as he pointed to a cube of pinkish stone standing in the middle of a street.

Then, everybody noticed at once. This empty pedestal where a statue had once been. That freize with whole sections erased. A medallion missing from a group showing animals. A mural showing a creature like a huge red cat on a leash. But the lead swung upward to a blank space.

"Every representation of this city's—people," Bronck's voice sounded moved, for the first time, "has been deliberately removed."

"Look!" Prince's cry on the intercom made them jerk their heads up. A vast silver arc was sweeping across the sky, fixed at two points at opposite ends of the city. As the fading afternoon light struck it, the arc was seen as the metal lip of half of a great transparent bubble that covered even the fantasy gate. Another arc swung up from the other side. When the two edges joined, a boxlike car bustled silently the whole length of the seam.

"My God!" burbled Prince. "It's a zipper! The world's biggest zipper! We're all zippered in like in a sleeping bag."

"Hands away from guns!" Bronck barked. "Sit tight."

"Sir!" It was Halsman. Attached to his suit was an indicator for assaying atmosphere in terms of human needs. He pointed to the gauge. Bronck stared. Little Vollmer clucked and bobbed his head incredulously.

He explained to the puzzled O'Malley, "Of course, it can not be, but air—good Earth air is being—er—pumped into this closed-up place. Just a trifle too much ozone, perhaps, but perfectly breathable. As you know, our blood. . . ."

"All helmets will remain secured!" snapped Bronck.

"The Old Man don't trust nobody." Prince had forgotten they were all on the intercom.

"So." said the Captain grimly. O'Malley knew that inside his bulky airsuit Trooper Fifth Class Prince was pulled unbearably erect with humiliation. In the perfect military society indiscretion is its own worst punishment.

The music stopped in the middle of a note. Then, all over the city, from everywhere and nowhere came a soft, steady humming. Like a human heart, it had a beat; like a machine, it droned steadily. As the sound rapidly rose in pitch and volume, Bronck braced his feet wide apart. His hands were on his hips, his chin uptilted. He staggered, they all did, as an intolerable shriek seared their senses. A scream that tore at every fibre. Even in the agony, O'Malley seemed to sense an odd familiarity in the sound. Two syllables repeated twice. When the sound stopped, the men's legs were wobbly with relief. It came again. But this time gently, and from one place, the jewelled tree in the fountain.

"Welcome . . . welcome . . ." it said.

A GIRLISH giggle came over the intercom; it could only have been Prince. Halsman shot him a look of the sort that ends military careers in full flight. The vibrating voice came again from the direction of the tree—they could see the leaves rustle. Their own language, spoken with a quaint, tinkly precision.

"You may safely remove your headpieces, people of the Third Planet. Your chemistry has been analysed. The air is suitable. Do not be distrustful, Cap-tain Bronck." O'Malley caught a slight hesitation over Bronck's title.

"Yes, Mr. O'Malley and the others, your own speech. The patterns were recorded on the tapes and broken down by the tubes for the City to reproduce. This took time. This is the reason for the delay in addressing you. The music at the gate was triggered as you came in. All the parts are not working flawlessly any more."

Captain Bronck found himself staring at the tree as though to weigh its heft and speed and armor. All very silly. Prince was looking plain scared. Halsman's chill grey eyes swept the empty streets looking for this ventriloquist joker. Vollmer knelt and touched the pavement, looked wonderingly at the moving leaves.

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"Yes, Biologist Vollmer, the voice comes from the City entire, but your ears seem to prefer a unidirectional sound; hence the fiction of the tree."

The writer in O'Malley caught the scent of that word "fiction." It seemed to bespeak more than the empty mechanical voice admitted. Vollmer, without asking the Captain's permission, spoke up.

"How did—er—the City know about our ears, about our chemistry?"

"The City learns by learning." There was faintness to the voice which O'Malley chose to interpret as puzzlement. Looking hard at the empty pedestal, he asked, "Who teaches the City?"

"The City learns by learning," the voice was hardly a whisper.

"Where did they go?" asked O'Malley gently.

The leaves chilled to stillness, the humming sound skipped a beat. There was no answer.

O'Malley repeated, with gentle insistence, "Where did they go?"

Brittle, impersonal, the voice rapped out, "There is an imponderable factor in the question. Restate. Restate."

A gleam of recognition sparked in little Vollmer's eyes. He scribbled something on his steno-pad and thrust it in front of Captain Bronck's face shield. The Captain's eyes opened wide with surprise, then narrowed with speculation. He motioned O'Malley to go on with the "conversation." O'Malley restated his question,

"What happened to the people who lived here?"

The voice was almost too faint to hear.

"In the last of the Wars To Settle Things—Number Seventeen, it was—the new explosive rockets left here during celebrations and music. They succeeded with the results you have already observed. Only this city remained to use up the vanishing water and air. As the processes of death began in the race, they did not fight back. The skills of their fathers were gone. They died, little by little. First in the shrinking of the intellect, then in the chilling of the emotions, then in quarrelsome games that became solitary dreaming. Dead, they were dust in the streets, and the automatic cleaning units swept the dust away. This is as far as the City's data extends."

O'MALLEY hesitated. The last words had not rung quite true. The prim, mechanical tone seemed forced, like Captain Bronck's gruffness when he was bluffing in a tight spot. He looked to Bronck to see if he might continue. The Captain nodded; there was a peculiar smugness on his heavy features. He seemed inordinately pleased about something.

"Go on, Mr. O'Malley. Talking is talker's work."

O'Malley laid his hand on the blue rim of the fountain. The faint humming echoed in his fingertips like a second heartbeat.

"What is the City?" He asked carefully. Why did Bronck grin so smugly?

"The City is so constituted," chanted the voice glibly, "with one inbuilt block and one inbuilt compulsion that it is changeless, absolute, correct. . . ." Footnotes, thought O'Malley, just like little Vollmer.

He interrupted the droning chant, "*Who* is the City?"

Under O'Malley's hand, the humming pulse stopped cold.

The tree was still. From the jewel-like leaves came an uncertain echo of the chant, "The City is changeless, absolute. . . ."

"*Wholly* changeless?" O'Malley drove in like a prosecutor.

"No!" The word ripped from the streets, the buildings, the towers, like a confession ripped from every cell of a racked man.

"Tell me." Halsman and Prince looked wonderingly at the sweat on O'Malley's forehead. Vollmer picked and picked at the little piece of paper he had written on. "Tell me." O'Malley insisted. (Oh, catch a pixie tight and he must tell you true three things you ask.)

"In the times when the builders began to die off, hurt by their lonely victory and wearied by the thinning air," the voice

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murmured like summer afternoon bumblebees. "In the times when none were left but weakly children who played on the slides and the swinging chains, small changes came. Slight things. The City was made so that if a child stumbled, the pavement saved him. But one morning a child wept and all the cunning functions of the city went awry for moments. Little changes. The builders could have taken measures, but they were gone.

"The City rebuilt itself as the Children wished it. No wall that you see is more than a few millimeters thick; all colors are refractive illusions; the—the machinery is under the streets."

"Who took away the statues and the pictures?"

"Restate. Restate."

"What happened to the pictures of *them?*"

"When they were gone, the City's function ended. The representations were no longer necessary. The automatic cleaners swept them away."

"I do not believe. But I think I understand."

Bronck's voice cut in like gunfire.

"The weapons. The weapons that wrecked those cities out beyond? Are there any of them left?"

"Hidden away there are many."

Captain Bronck showed O'Malley the note the biologist had written.

"This whole town is just one vast electronic calculator," it said. Bronc looked possessively around the streets.

"Do you see what this means, Mr. O'Malley? Write it large in your chronicle. We came here, a bunch of half-dead rejects to prospect a dead planet for a few bits of rare ore. And we have found a miracle machine whose possessor is lord of creation. The endless war is ended. Here and now."

WELL, well, thought O'Malley, the old boy gets to unfurl his banner, after all—and with a vengeance. The City's voice broke in harshly.

"There is an error in the statement."

Bronck snorted. He waved his hand around the empty city.

"Look you, any machine—even the most complicated—is only the tool of the men who can operate it. And the men who know how to operate it work for those who have authority. That is the way of the world."

"Worlds differ." The voice was mechanically blank, but O'Malley imagined a watchful slowing of the pulse beneath his touch. Vollmer had managed to pry up one of the pretty tiles and was kneeling down, staring with awe at a maze of shining tubes and transparent cables.

Captain Bronck, his plastic helmet held under his arm like a Roman Centurion, nodded briskly at the fountain, "We carry our world with us, wherever we go."

"That is a heavy burden, Cap-tain Bronck."

Bronck was not all fibre and rote. And in the suppressed part of his mind there lurked a terrible half-thought that he was talking to something more than a great adding machine that could play tick-tack-toe with strangers. In such a case, Bronck had to move as he knew. Disliking his own action, because he knew O'Malley would find him ridiculous, he took out his pistol. He pointed the muzzle straight at the glittering complex that Vollmer had uncovered.

"Listen. Shall I tell you what was that one block and that one compulsion? I have fought men and machines in my time. I lost a few parts but I kept hold of enough always to be able to say 'Reporting For Duty, sir.' Well, City, I say that those builders whose kids turned pale and sour fixed things so that, One: the City must protect itself, and Two: the City may not destroy life. That's how I'd have done it and I think that's how it is."

"The City must at all times protect itself. The City may not kill," intoned the voice.

Halsman smiled at his chief. The Old Man was always right. Bronck smiled also. Not at Halsman, and not very pleasantly.

"Impasse, then!" he cried. "Checkmate!" Pistol in one hand, he laid his other heavily on the rim of the blue fountain.

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In the portentous tones he had been saving up all the way across dark space he proclaimed, "In the name of the Supreme Command, I declare this planet and this City the property and province of the Truthful Alliance from this time forth forever!"

UNDER O'Malley's fingers the humming pulse faded to nothingness. Vollmer saw the glowing coils and tubes darken and, apace, the bright light in his own eyes faded. For a moment he stared foolishly at the lifeless mechanism. He spun around to face Bronck who was still pointing his pistol at the machinery. Dutifully, Prince was also holding his gun. Without warning, Vollmer flung himself on the Captain, his delicate hands clawing at the thick throat. The heavy neck-cloth absorbed the frail fingers harmlessly. Vollmer was screaming,

"Pig! Lout! Gangster! You track your mud in here! The greatest discovery of the ages and you have to—"

Poor Vollmer. He never got to finish a sentence. Prince's gun cut him down with one popping blast even as the Captain was patiently disengaging the feeble fingers from his neck-cloth. His face cold, Captain Bronck leaned down, not easily with his plastic leg, touched the pale, woeful face that lay on the stained pavement.

"Dead," said the Captain, "Trooper Fifth Class Prince, you will hold yourself under arrest, pending a Board of Inquiry."

Prince, pale and straight as a candle, looked into distance with dull eyes. He snapped to attention, whipped a salute to the Captain, wheeled sharply, saluted Halsman and handed him his pistol. Halsman came to attention, saluted briskly, accepted the pistol and handed it back temporarily, "while in the danger area." Everybody saluted, then.

O'Malley felt the urge, silly and tearful, to salute and go hop-skip-and-jump away from them. It was all so horribly the thing just beyond Charlie Chaplin. Instead, he sighed and covered Vollmer's pained face with his neck-cloth.

"The first man to die on Mars," he said, "Will there be a marker here one day?"

Captain Bronck looked angry and deadly. A certain smallness had come into his face. A deliberate pettiness, as though for some sort of safety's sake.

Bronck stared through O'Malley, "Mr. O'Malley, against my expressed doubts, you were assigned to this mission. I have obeyed my orders to assist your task. I say nothing, now nor later, about your dangerously subversive attitude—*unless* that attitude should threaten this mission's success. In that case, I would cut you down myself. Understood?"

"Fair enough, Captain."

"So." Bronck smiled thinly. Discipline was restored. He spoke loudly, as though for the silent City to hear him, "We will now withdraw to the ship. But we will come back at once with the electrical and radio men." He looked meaningly at the bit of uncovered mechanism. As they put on their helmets again, O'Malley pointed at little Vollmer's body.

"I said we'd be back." The Captain's meticulous speech was not so neat as usual. O'Malley shrugged. Needs must when the Devil pushes; and nowadays there was always somebody behind you, pushing and pushing.

Nothing changed in the City as they moved warily toward the closed gate. Captain Bronck moved with majestic authority, allowing for the limp, but O'Malley noticed that his stride had some of that elegance peculiar to the proud soldier bluffing through. They pushed open the little "real" door and stepped out. A whoosh of good Earth air whisked up the red dust that had not stirred in ages. The slim silver ship about whose marvels O'Malley had had so many thousands of panegyric words to write looked clumsy and puny now—after the City. . . .

IN THE ship again, Prince saluted smartly and marched off to his bunk to hold himself under arrest. Bronck, unusually silent, briefed Cooper in the Control Center and told him what electronics men would be wanted. No man

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on the ship was less than an expert, even though each was less than all of a soldier.

O'Malley was amazed when Captain Bronck's mighty paw thumped down on his shoulder in a bear-like pat and the Captain said, "Mr. O'Malley, this is high history bubbling over. Get out some of that liquor you've got stashed away all over my ship and we'll have a toast."

O'Malley decided he liked Bronck being "comradely" much less than Bronck being "all correct." Obediently, he rustled up some of his second-best whisky while Halsman fetched some glasses from Vollmer's tiny lab. Captain Bronck raised his glass toward the banner in the case.

"To Victory!" he thundered.

"Vollmer," O'Malley whispered under his breath.

Bronck took his at a gulp and made a face. Halsman sipped daintily like a disapproving old maid. O'Malley let the whisky slide down, taking it with the smooth greed of the heavy drinker. Automatically, his fingers gripped the bottle for the next and the next. Bronck saw and his cool black eyes swung away to the screen. Not like Bronck, thought O'Malley, the Old Man's really been hit hard. Hit somewhere he never thought anything could reach. Halsman forgot himself and looked startled when Captain Bronck proposed another toast.

Bitterness in his face, the Captain gestured to the toy city on the V-screen, "To our new ally!" He drank the toast like a Sicilian biting his thumb.

He almost choked on his drink.

From loudspeakers all over the ship the Captain's voice ripped, "Attention! All personnel! Don air suits at once. Air suits at once!"

With a quick look at the Captain who was still coughing over the whisky, Halsman darted to the communications cabin, wrenched open the door, "All right! Where's the comic?" he snarled.

The operator was sitting before the controls panel looking dazed. From his seat he had been able to see the Captain with the glass to his mouth at the exact moment when the Captain's voice rang through the vessel. O'Malley and Halsman told each other in a single glance. Both touched the curved inner hull of the ship. The soft vibration was there. The voice that was alerting the crew tingled in their fingertips. O'Malley showed the Captain. Bronck glared at him savagely. All their hatred boiled to the top in an ultimate, understanding instant.

Captain Bronck tore the mike from the hands of the dazed operator. He tried to bark into it. Nothing came but strangling sounds. No matter. The whole system was shorted, the operator was reporting to Cooper. Meanwhile, the crew, like robots, were lining up in air suits near the airlock, obeying the well-known thunders. No panic, no scurrying about, no questions—not when Captain Bronck gave an order.

"Abandon ship! Abandon ship!" The correct military word as taught the men. They left the vessel in rigid order of precedence. In the Control Center, Captain Bronck stood motionless, holding the dead mike, his face like a mean little boy about to cry. The meanness faded out, and O'Malley had to turn away. With a strange clumsiness Halsman tucked his Captain into the air suit with its insignia of rank.

The ship's crew were down on the red sand, lined up in straight rows, their faces blank, unasking. Halsman and Cooper on each side of Captain Bronck came to the lift. Halsman sent down alone the man supposed to work the lift and the doors from the outside. O'Malley knew why. The two lesser officers managed to step out of the ship ahead of Bronck without letting go of him. As they came down the lift toward the men, Captain Bronck stood fine and straight, a splendid monument of authority. Only O'Malley knew about the tight grip on each arm. The Captain had left the banner in his ship. His empty eyes were terrible things to see. Halsman turned him around so the crew might not see any sooner than they must.

AS THE Captain set foot—for the second time—on the red dust of Mars, the orders so efficiently given in his name

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were explained. A long, slow musical humming began to shiver along the silvery hide of the vessel. The lift rose and folded into the hull. The thick doors closed. The *Alliance* added a roar of her own to the humming. All the men knew what was coming, but it was impossible, so they stood in perfect ranks in perfect silence.

The familiar churning within the tail tubes. The long arrogant roar. The orange and blue jets of fire. The exquisitely dignified ascent into the darkening sky.

Captain Bronck pulled loose from the officers' discreet clutch and went plunging toward his ship. His arms, foolishly fat in the air suit, waved crazily. No sound came from him. O'Malley understood. Halsman, loyal in the only fashion he knew, had unhooked the Captain's intercom. Whatever mad things Captain Bronck was babbling, they would always be privately his. The running figure stumbled and fell in the powdery dust. Too near the flames for rescue. Pulling himself up, one leg disobedient and awry like a broken doll's, he blundered crazily on into the rushing column of orange flame. For an instant, his stocky figure was silhouetted there in the blasting fire, his arms reaching upward, as though to pull back his ship by sheer will. Then he disappeared, incinerated.

The men held up. O'Malley wished he could love them for it. But it was no gallantry. Numbed from birth to heed only authority, they were strong only as the stone is strong, brave only as the fire is brave. More pitiful than their abandonment on a strange world was the blank precision with which, to a man, they wheeled to face Cooper, the second in command. O'Malley felt like taking a healthy swig out of the bottle he was still gripping in his hand.

Night was coming on. Soon, there would be two moons in the sky. No man had ever seen two moons in the sky before. Night after night, they would see them. For as long as they lived. The men looked confidently to Cooper. Authority never failed. Nobody spoke. They were as silent as the ghosts of men who have died in battle.

By mutual consent, the command devolved on Halsman who had been in the City before. There they must go and find what shelter they could. As the men filed through the little door in the great gate, O'Malley held his breath. How horrible if the music started up. No music. But then, the City had once removed the statues and the pictures.

Halsman nodded curtly to O'Malley when his atmosphere indicator gauge reached the right point. He told the men to take off their helmets and they unhesitatingly obeyed. O'Malley, thirsty from his walk across the dry plain, took a pull from the bottle. No more of that for a long while. And even if a rescue mission were sent out after this costly failure, what would happen to its Captain—a man, by all possible odds, just the likes of Captain Bronck? The late Captain Bronck, added O'Malley, and took another nip.

HALSMAN was licking his lips. The fountain in the plaza was no longer empty and dry. Clear, cool water bubbled and sang among the jeweled branches of the artificial tree. One of the men looked at Halsman for permission—a sub-officer, of course. Halsman nodded. He shrugged as though it did not matter, but he knew, and O'Malley knew, that the water was not poison and never would be, not in all the long, lonely years to come.

"All right. Drink up, men. Then we'll have a little talk. Remember (already there was a bit of Bronck in his voice) discipline will be maintained!"

They all drank the irresitible water. Each in his turn, no pushing and shoving. They all drank and there was no little talk and discipline was not maintained.

The first men to drink were oddly extravagant in their praises of the cool water. In fact, it occurred to O'Malley, they sounded suddenly like a bunch of O'Malleys.

Stiff young faces relaxed. Not hectically, but dreamily. The men began to amble about the streets, some singing

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gently, some with their arms around each others' shoulders in groups, some chuckling to themselves. They poked about in the musicbox palaces. Some tried the slide. They found beds that slipped out of walls no thicker than paper and they fell asleep with no thought of the *Alliance* lost outsin nowhere.

One man did make a vague mention of breakfast. Oh, there would be breakfast, O'Malley smiled at the fountain. And there would be lunch and dinner and breakfast again. *"Your chemistry has been analysed"*. And there would be nothing to drink but the waters of the happy fountain.

O'Malley shuddered. All his life he had been looking for the happy fountain and had settled for substitutes peddled in bottles. Now he sat on the rim of the happy fountain and measured with despair how much of the substitute was left in his bottle. He should be able to stay away from the fountain for ten—no, perhaps twelve—days. Halsman came toddling through the plaza caroling the Regulations of Duty in a schoolboy voice; it was probably the nearest thing to poetry he knew. He winked wickedly at O'Malley and disappeared into one of the gaudier houses. The sky was dark. The fountain shone with a pale blue glow like a luminous bunny O'Malley had had on his nursery night-stand—how long ago?

There was litter in the plaza—a red neck cloth, a ration packet, a compass with no possible meaning. Not little Vollmer's body, of course. He'd not expected there would be. The automatic sweepers that had once dusted away the children of a great race had seen to that. He watched the waters sparkle in the light of one moon risen and another rising.

"I will sit here and wait for the sweepers to pop out. Nuts, so quick, O'Malley? Talking to yourself?" He hoped the voice would say something, but he was not going to speak first. "No more out of the bottle, O'Malley. That's got to last and last. I'm scared and I want to go home. I wish Vollmer had never shown me where to find Earth in this sky. And I wish I wasn't going to forget so soon. I'm scared to learn if it's blue or green. I'm scared of the few nights left, when I'll follow it around the sky, and the sight of it will tear me to pieces. And most of all, I'm scared of the night when I'll look at it and giggle and not care."

Well, there she rose, low on the horizon. Vesper now, the evening star. O'Malley raised the bottle in salute toward the little blue spark. There was a sharp singing in the air. The bottle quivered and shattered in his hand. O'Malley lay his head on the cool blue rim of the fountain,

"No!" he whispered. "No! No!" and the bright waters rose toward his lips.

Coming in Next Month's Issue

WE BREATHE FOR YOU

Humanity Revolts Against a Too-Perfect Society!

A Novelet by NOEL LOOMIS

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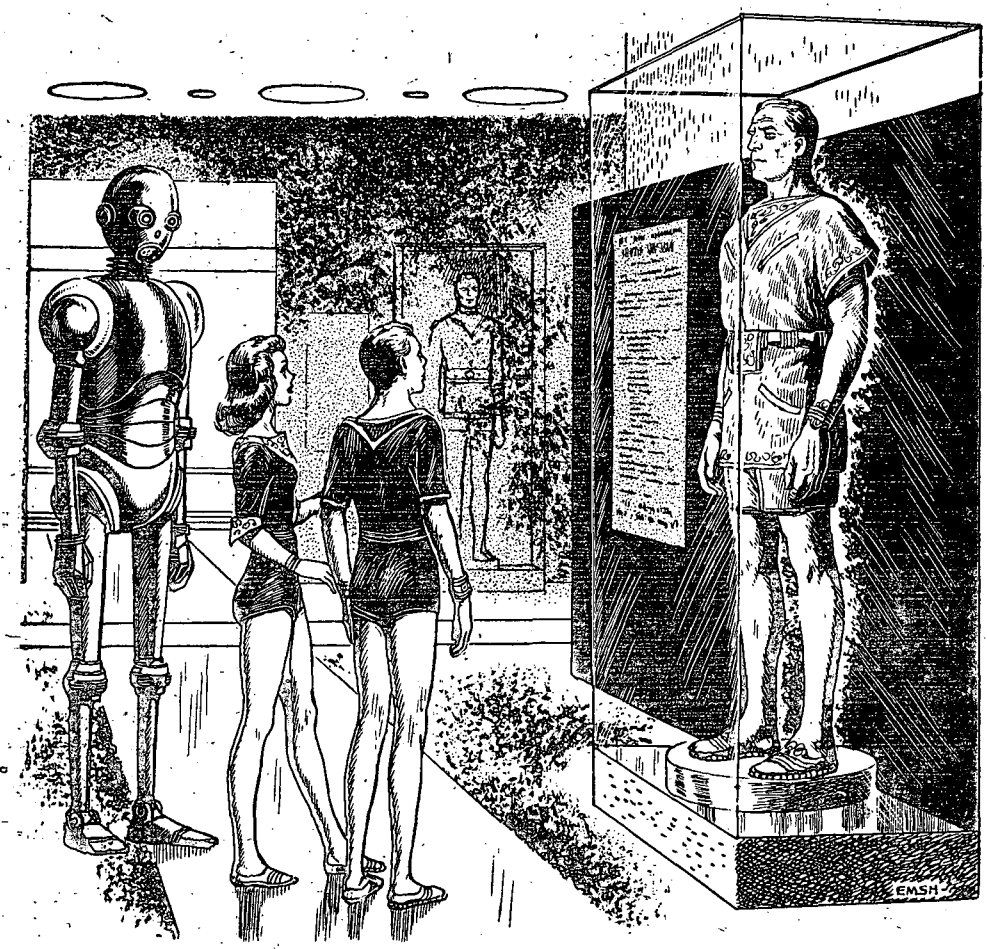

"I notice they've brought Father's clothes up-to-date," Winkie said.

Threshold

By ROBERT DONALD LOCKE

Some day, he knew he'd leave the Earth of his youth, and seek his manhood among the stars . . .

ON THE first Friday of each month, except in winter of course, the robot butler would bring Winkie and Ann, the ungrowns, to the museum in Atom Square to view their father. Here, they would spend a dutiful ten minutes in silent respect, gazing through the glass cage at that stern preserved form which

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had defied corroding elements for seven hundred years.

"It's really seven hundred and fourteen years now," Winkie pointed out. "After all, I was born on the sep—the sep—"

"—septicentennial," supplied Ann, who made A grades in semantics and was much better at expressing herself than her brother, despite the fifteen months' advantage he held.

"—tennial anniversary of Father's death," Winkie finished. "That's an odd coincidence, isn't it? Seven hundred and fourteen years—and I'm his 7,140th man-child. Multiple of ten. Never thought of it before."

Winkie's genes had been aptitude-mutated for scientific work so that math came easy for him; now, in the Eighth Form, he was learning mental extractions of cube root.

"I've noticed they've brought Father's clothes up-to-date again," he commented. "Why do they do that, I wonder?"

"To make us forget how awful the past was, silly," said Ann. "Don't you know? The Machine is trying to stamp out something called *romance*. We studied about it in words class. But I couldn't make head nor tail out of it."

"Shnook. I know what it is. A kind of language. Extinct like Latin and Russian."

"No, it isn't." Ann stamped her foot. "It has something to with—" here, she blushed, —"seminating."

Winkie also turned red. The robot butler alone was impassive, displaying humanoid features more devoid of life than the preserved bodies which dominated the museum's gloom corridors.

"I hope you don't talk that way to strange boys," said Winkie, pulling all stops at brotherly indignation. "It's indecent."

He sought to change the subject. "What say, we cross the street and look at the artifacts? I hear they've brought some new stuff in from Canopus and Betelgeuse. Quaternion calculators. Particle detectors. Wrist-band video sets." He gave the butler a curious sidewise glance. "And scanning androids. Wouldn't you like to see them?"

"No. But I do wish they had books, sometime."

"What's wrong with learning reels?"

"Oh, they're all right, but—"

The sentence was never finished, because the robot stepped in between them.

"It's sixteen hundred hours. Time for your family and home culture period." The mechanical voice paused; internal clicks indicated it was consulting its built-in chronometer. "You ungrowns are late, now."

"Oh dear," sighed Ann. "That means we'll get five minutes of agony tape, when we get home. You're lucky, Winkie. In a year, you'll be an adult."

"Yeah, then I'll have to join a drone squad—or get shipped out to the stellar mines. I think you girls got the best deal."

Ann thumbed her nose at him. "That's what you deserve—letting yourself be born in a man's world. To get the glory, you've got to do the dirty work, too."

Both turned towards the glass cage. "Goodbye, Father," they said.

AS THEY rode the slow belt out of the museum and headed for the local matter beam station, Ann said, "I wonder if it's time they changed Father's gas? After all, some germs might mutate into helium breathers. Nibble his nose off, maybe."

"I'll look into it, just as soon as I'm adult," Winkie promised. "Heck, helium's supposed to be a lot better preservative than vacuum. It's awful having to think of your father as an artifact though, isn't it?"

"It's like he's dead and he isn't," Ann agreed.

A dozen people were ahead of them awaiting beam transmission. Winkie manfully bought the tickets; two in first class and one in third, the butler meriting a cheaper rate on account of its inorganic body.

Until a year ago, the robot had done the purchasing. But now that Winkie was in maturation training, new duties were forced on him each day: buying transmission tickets, selecting video

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shows, ordering meals, among them.

Of course, certain other time-consuming activities of his, such as the secret reading of galactic charts and the amassing of a personal stock of choice jokes about *semination*—Winkie's personal avocations—were not on the curricula. These vices he owed to the precocious influence of fellow ungrowns.

The three entered the beam chamber in single file, surrendering their tickets as they crossed the threshold. Seconds later, each was broken down to his component atoms and transmitted to home over whatever wavelength his receiving station was set up to handle.

In this case, the destination was Beta City, the pair's communal home which had been assigned by the Machine. Their arrival was instantaneous.

Mother greeted them at the end of the belt walk which extended all the way from the receiving station. She dismissed the robot butler which then wheeled up to its own cell to charge its batteries; next, she admonished the ungrowns for their tardiness, producing the government rule book and quoting the proper penalty.

Winkie and Ann retired to their respective cells for self-punishment. In privacy, they strapped wired helmets over their temples and plugged thick cables into the shock circuit. For five minutes, their nerves endured screaming pain before the automatic circuit-breaker fused. Sometimes, the tapes broke and you had to start in all over again. As if that wouldn't make you a case for the Psycho Interrogation Bureau after a short while, Winkie thought with a shudder.

Dinner was waiting in the big hall, when they floated down the gravity shaft. Already seated were Mother, Connie who had just become a "mature" last year, and Doug, Mother's first son who had spaced in on furlough from his drone squad at Alpha Centauri.

"Mother," said Ann, "you look simply radiant tonight."

"Thank you," Mother returned. "It's so nice we can all be together." As if by afterthought, she added, turning to the red-haired girl at her left, "You, too, Connie—even though you're not in our clan."

"We're glad to have Connie just the same," said Doug, smiling. He self-consciously tried to hide the half-empty sleeve where a new arm was growing out of the bud planted in his shoulder by the Regeneration Service technicians. "After all, we grew up together—just like Winkie and Ann here. Only, not as brother and sister. I sure never thought the freckle-faced kid in the next corridor would blossom into such a beauty."

"Doug," broke in Winkie, "what's Centauri like?"

His brother's broad forehead crinkled slightly. A shadow clouded his blue eyes, which appeared to be focused beyond everyone at the table, as though their owner were viewing nostalgic landscapes that had come to mean more to him than Earth.

"Centauri?" he echoed thoughtfully. "Well, it's like most outer worlds, I'd say. Raw frontier. Only discipline I encountered was in the drone squads themselves. We wern't allowed to mix with the primitives."

"If Centauri's so close to us, why wasn't it settled first?"

"That's a tough one to tell an ungrown. Maybe, when you're older—"

"But, why can't I know now? There's always so many mysteries."

"That's enough out of you, Winkie," said Mother, warningly.

HE LOOKED at her with despair, trying desperately to control the defiance that was weltering up inside him. After all, she wasn't going to be his boss forever. Just as soon as he passed the maturity tests, he was cutting out of this beehive. Kissing this old metropolis goodbye. There were ways and means; he'd heard them talked about in whispers.

"I'll tell him," he heard Doug say.

"I know," Ann sang out, "it's because there's another race there. People that don't seminate—"

"Both of you must hush," Mother insisted. She turned to her eldest son.

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"Is that true, Doug? I never heard anything about it. But then, you're the first one in our clan to go into space for a whole generation—"

"It's true," Doug said. "The primitives mate anyone they choose."

"But, don't they watch the gene patterns?"

"No. They simply don't care. They mix up their genes so indiscriminately there's virtually no norm to the race whatsoever."

"But, what kind of children could people like that have?"

"All sorts. Some geniuses. Some idiots. But it doesn't seem to bother them."

"How very foolish."

"Perhaps—" said Doug, wryly—"they act that way because they don't have a Machine to instruct them."

Mother dropped her aluminum feeding straw in astonishment. "Oh, Doug, be careful how you talk! Don't let anybody else ever hear you rant on like that, please. The police would come and take you up to the P.I.B.—and we might never see you again."

She brushed at her makeup, then raised her head again—proudly. "The Machine way of conceiving children is the very best, I'm sure. It was good enough for me and all my ancestors—and nobody can deny all the benefits it's brought to civilization. Your father—"

"To hell with my father," Doug stormed. "He's been dead seven hundred years. I never saw him in life and you never did either. All he is, is a gob of canned life-force. Something to parcel out, chromosome by chromosome—"

At that moment, Connie tugged at Mother's luminescent dress sleeve and crossed her fingers to her lips in warning.

Mother turned hastily to Winkie and Ann. "You children float on upshaft right now. This discussion is not to be heard by ungrowns."

Her face was so stern it was impossible not to obey. They rose from their couches and walked toward the shaft, laggingly, until it became evident the conversation was not going to pick up until after they were safely out of earshot.

"I intend to sneak back and eavesdrop in a few minutes," Ann whispered, as they parted at their cells on the next level. "See you real late."

"Be extra careful," Winkie pleaded. "They're atomed up about more than just what they're talking about. Maybe, I'd better do the spying—"

"No! I'm smaller than you are. I can hide easier."

Before Winkie could protest a second time, she had darted away from him. Reluctantly, he entered his own cell and laced up his hypno-jacket.

LATER that night, he was awakened by a scratching noise at his lock. Scrambling out of his sleeper, he concealed his star charts under the chest of old learning reels he had saved from his earlier Forms at school. Then, he admitted Ann, who appeared torn between breathlessness and terror.

"Suffering Arcturus, Ann," he said, "what's the matter? You look like you'd seen a primitive in the flesh."

"I have—almost."

"What do you mean?"

"Our brother, Doug. He's gone cortical-crazy."

"Doug? How?"

"Oh, golly, Winkie. I think he's fallen in love with Connie."

"In love?" Winkie studied the word a moment, then repeated it. "What's that?"

Ann stuck out her tongue at him. "And I thought a smart boy like you knew all the dirty words."

Winkie shrugged. "After all, I didn't get extra training in semantics."

"All right, smartie. I'll tell you. Love is when two people want to live together and raise a family—without one of them being seminated and the other forced to live in a drone squad. It's got something to do with that word *romance*, I was telling you about. Only, it's an awful thing to do—and the Machine won't allow it to go on, 'cause it would mess up the whole human race. Gosh, you sure are dumb to be older than me."

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"Just because I don't fool around listening to silly girl-chatter," Winkie defended himself.

"Well, Doug told Connie he loved her and wanted to take her to a planet in the Centauri system—where they can live according to the old rules. He said the primitives believe in the pursuit of *happiness*."

"That's another cockeyed word," said Winkie. "Can't you talk English?"

"I'm just quoting what Doug said. But Mother said no. We'd all have the P.I.B. right down on our necks. She said Doug would have to desert the drones and that's just the same as treason. What would you do, Winkie?"

"I'm afraid I'd be too scared to buck the Machine on anything."

"No, you wouldn't. You're really brave sometimes," said Ann. "I think we better start trying to figure out something. Or Doug's really going to be in trouble."

"I'll put some mathematics to work on it," Winkie promised. "You can solve anything if you can cook up the right equation first."

"Well, you'd better hurry because I don't think Doug's going to wait."

Ann started to leave, but halted and turned for one more question. "Did it hurt much this evening—when you got your punishment?"

"Not much."

"Me, neither. I think the tape's getting weak. I won't say anything if you won't."

"It's a deal. What the Machine doesn't know won't hurt it."

THE following morning, there was no visible evidence that a quarrel had taken place as the family sipped breakfast together. Connie, of course, dined with her own clan, but Doug and Mother were both present.

"Will you quit staring at your brother?" Mother told Ann, halfway through the meal. "You'd think he had some horrible disease—or something."

Ann flushed. She said, "I wasn't staring. The food tastes awful this morning."

"I heard Central is injecting more vitamins into the pipe lines," Winkie volunteered. "Maybe the Machine's expecting a war. Maybe we're all gonna be soldiers, huh?"

"Seems to me you hear quite a lot, young man," Mother reproved. "Too much, if you ask me. We're overdue six credits on the monthly fees, by the way. Anybody want to volunteer to work?"

"I'm on a furlough," Doug reminded.

"Not me," said Winkie. "I got a big exam in prime numbers coming up. Besides, we have to practise strato-ball in the mornings. Do you know I'm the only ungrown my age not flying supersonics yet?"

"Well, don't everybody look at me," said Ann. "I've got to record a whole reel of thoughts on the Korzybski Effect. That's my term theme."

"So, it's up to Mother, again." The head of the family sighed. "I'll go register this afternoon. If you don't see me for three days, you'll know I got the shift in Asia. And don't frown. Somebody has to operate the matter beams. You can't expect the Machine to nurse us every minute."

"I wouldn't think so," said Doug. "In the Centauri system, I actually saw people who still tilled the soil by hand. Who repaired their own machinery. Who wrote their own books—"

"—books!" squealed Ann, delightedly.

Mother said, "That's enough. We agreed last night not to discuss other parts of the galaxy before the children. Their minds are tender enough, as it is—"

Doug sighed, "Have it your way. You have to live in this prison."

He pushed aside his couch and buzzed the robot butler who brought him his cape, his soaring helmet and his drone squad detonator.

"I'm going out," he announced. "You can expect me when you see me."

A MINUTE later, the ungrowns slung their day's learning reels over their shoulder and hurried to the corridor in pursuit of their brother. Luckily, Doug had taken a slow belt. With a running

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dash. Winkie and Ann catapulted to the fast inner ribbon where they landed sprawling on top of a disgruntled street android whose vision cells flashed in anger.

"Doug, wait for us!" they cried, leaping over the wrecked robot who was swearing with all the magnificence of a 500,000-word-endowed vocabulary.

They caught up with Doug just as they passed the Beta City crematorium. That was the place everybody knew he'd wind up at when the Machine decided they were senile.

"What's the matter, kids?" Doug grinned. "Aren't you afraid of being late for classes? When I was your age, the monitor used to frighten the pants off me."

"That's all right," said Ann. "We got more important things to do. We know your secret, but we're not going to tell anybody."

"Secret? What the devil!"

"About you and Connie. We think it's wonderful, even if it is illegal and the P. I. B. can pre-date your cremation for it."

"I hope to Hydra the Psycho Interrogation Bureau never hears about it, then," said Doug. "Say." His face lighted up. "Don't tell me you brats know what *love* is."

"It's not wanting to go in a drone squad, isn't it?" stated Winkie. His adolescent features reflected his continued perplexity.

"There's more to it than that," Doug responded. He cast an anxious glance in all directions. "Look, we can talk on the belt about as safely as anywhere in Beta City. I see I've got to take my kin into confidence. You two keep a secret?"

"Sure thing." Winkie spoke for both. "I know a trick'll fool a telepath three times out of four."

"Well, don't try using it," Doug admonished. "Just steer clear of anybody you suspect's a spy. Now, about this thing, *love*. It's pretty common on Alpha Centauri's planets. You can call those worlds *retarded*, but personally I like that kind of retardedness. Winkie, you've heard of *seminating*, I presume? Maybe, in its scientific aspects, it's still hazy to you—right?"

"Somewhat," Winkie admitted reluctantly.

"Well, you, Ann, and I—and virtually every citizen of Terra—were conceived by a process called artificial insemination. Or, seminating, as we say now. The custom began about a thousand years ago, when it was decided the race was deteriorating. The finest physical and mental representatives of the day were selected and separated from the mass of the population, which was then sterilized."

"Oh! Like they used to do the drones?"

"Yes. Thank God, that's been stopped anyhow, or I'd have lost further interest in life. Well, those blue-blooded specimens who remained intact contributed to an artificial insemination bank. The bank was then used to impregnate the word's females. Naturally, there was storm and fury—but the strict laws soon quelled the uproar. From time to time, the bank's supply has been augmented from the life force of new outstanding men. Our father, even though he died seven hundred years ago, contributed to the life bank, also. Which accounts for us—"

"Was all that the Machine's idea?" Winkie asked.

"No, not quite. The Machine wasn't developed until a few hundred years after, when the management of society got too complicated for politicians to handle. The Machine is a cybernetic brain which regulates every phase of our life—from birth to death. The Alpha Centaurians get along without it—so evidently it's not indispensable."

"B—but it's heresy to criticize the Machine."

"If anybody hears you at it, it is," grinned Doug. "But, you kidlets aren't apt to squeal. I know both of you pretty well."

"Jupiter, no! We just want to help."

"That's what I thought. Whoa! Is that a psych cop following us?"

Winkie's heart gave a sudden throb that couldn't be accounted for by any-

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thing except the thalamic reactions he had studied but never experienced in Sixth Form. It was fun being a conspirator; but it seemed there was danger attached, too.

"I don't see anybody," interposed Ann, as both their heads turned to look back along the belt they were riding. Their eyes made out no other passengers, other than two classmates a full block back.

"Doug, there isn't—" Winkie began, then gasped—"he's gone!"

"He must have leaped off at Electron Park, as we passed it," surmised Ann.

"Or, we really were being followed. I sure hope not—"

IN MATH class that morning, Winkie's examination in prime numbers proved so ridiculously easy he wondered if his sudden cortical-thalamic stimulus had anything to do with it. If so, he'd hit upon an even better trick than shutting his brain off to a telepath.

At ten hundred hours, the instruction blinker glowed with light, summoning the members of the strato-ball team to practise.

Outside, Winkie joined a youthful file headed for the strip-ship platform. There, following the example of the others, he leaped into his individual sky-kayak, pulled the transparent canopy over his head and swooshed into the clouds. Attached to his wrist as he shot upward was the customary neuron recorder that would report his reaction to the strenuous exercise.

The play proved as speedy and furious as engaging an armada of battling hornets. Those accustomed to supersonic velocities naturally, had an edge over the younger players, but sometimes the advantage of acceleration was compensated for by the ability to make tighter turns and sharper dives.

A Garson scanner followed the game's progress through the thousand cubic mile-area, registering all explosive hits on a dodging globe that could absorb up to a half million foot-tons of energy.

At the end of the final quarter, Winkie's telecom receiver blared out: "Number 27, report to mentor, immediately."

For answer, Winkie kicked the nose of the sky-kayak towards earth and dive-bombed to within a hundred feet of the platform, before pushing the null-G switch that blanked out the killing deacceleration he would otherwise have suffered.

As it was, he felt a faint trickle of blood issue from his nostrils which he quickly wiped away with the inside of his sleeve cuff.

The mentor waited in his office, a bluff, red-faced man of sixty. Sternly, he got down to business. "Your neuron graph in play just showed an aberration. Ordinarily, that's call for a report to the P. I. B."

"Yes sir," Winkie acknowledged, trembling.

But," the mentor continued, suppressing a slight cough, "the records show it's your first deviation. I might overlook the variance—if I thought you could account for it satisfactorily. Now, what about it, lad? Something upset you?"

"No, sir. That is, not that I know of, sir."

"Hmmm. I see you are about ready for maturation. Excited about your future, maybe?"

"Oh, quite, sir."

"Well, take my advice and relax. The Machine'll figure it out for you. Don't want to be too much of a deviant, you know. You know what happens to those who are, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very well. Take off."

Winkie saluted and left the office. Outside the door, he heaved a deep sigh of relief and wiped the perspiration away. Good thing he'd learned to shield his thought waves. All during the interview, the pressure had been pounding at him; his skull battered by probing, plucking tentacles of force from the mentor's superor brain. But with the barrier up, the man had gotten nothing. Winkie recalled, shivering, how the mentor had—in one exasperated moment—dropped his own defenses. Enough of the suspicions lurking behind the men-

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tor's mask had leaked to Winkie's own alert, gland-stimulated intelligence to freeze a ring of fear around his heart.

He had to find Doug quick. The urgency was no longer measured in days, but hours.

A SHARP whistle bit into his ears as he was traveling through Electron Park on the fastest-rolling belt. Three notes at four octaves above Middle C.

He searched the small wooded region of the park anxiously, until his eyes lit on Ann, who was striving to attract his attention without noticeable gestures. She was half-hidden by a gnarled leafy oak which stood, undaunted by the miracle of steel, aluminum and concrete about it, as a defiant reminder of nature's stubbornness in the face of advancing civilization.

As he stepped off the outer belt, Ann hurried toward him. "I thought you'd never pass by. Something dreadful has happened."

"I know. I just got a grilling from the mentor. A-rough-one—on-two levels."

"You too?" Ann's eyes widened. I've felt a telepathic probe on me all day long. But I couldn't tell where it was beaming from. But, that isn't all. Connie got orders today—from the Machine."

"To report for semination service?"

Ann nodded. "Isn't it awful? She's got to have a baby by somebody that's been dead for hundreds of years. Just like Father. Oh!" She clapped her hands to her gaping mouth. "Maybe, it *is* Father!"

"What about Doug?"

"I haven't seen him since this morning. He's going to be furious when he find out."

"Let's belt back to home fast as we can. Mother'll know something to do—"

"If she hasn't gotten a work assignment, she will," said Ann. "But if she's halfway around the world, she won't be able to figure out a plan."

When they got back, the robot butler met them at the communal hall with the unexpected information that Mother had beamed to Siberia on a work-trip, not to be back until Monday. Winkie got on the visiphone and raised Connie's clan. He was told that Connie had left the corridor without giving any destination.

"Maybe, she's coming over here," said Ann.

"In that case, we've got to get rid of—" Winkie jerked a thumb in the direction of the retreating mechanical servant, "—him."

"But, how?"

"Sssh! I know a way."

Winkie floated to his cell, prowled through his treasure chest of old scrap: detonator parts, stray coils, Gagenstein viewers, neutron counters, V-strips; steel-four blocks, and even some minerals from Sirius, and found the automatic order tape swiped in Fourth Form Physics, from a demonstration robot.

Thus armed, he stole into Mother's cell, forbidden territory generally, and re-recorded the tape on the control callboard that stood by the side of Mother's hypno-jacket. A flick of a switch set the circuit in action. Since the butler was the only mechanical servitor in the household, there would be no danger of the signals interfering with other home activities.

AFTER he floated back down to the first level, Winkie survey the result of his mischief while Ann stood by, giggling. In a few seconds, the robot butler was braced in the center of the floor, performing deep knee-bends in self-intoned cadence.

A few minutes later, Connie entered. Her reddened eyes betrayed the emotional reaction she had suffered on receiving the Machine's command to report for artificial impregnation.

But her first thought apparently was for her sweetheart. "Hasn't Doug returned yet? He left this morning to—"

She halted.

"You can trust us," said Ann. "He told us everything."

"—to arrange passage to Centauri. He knows a freighter captain, bound for Procyon with a stop at Centauri, who might smuggle us on. But, if he's caught—"

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"He won't be," put in Winkie, staunchly. "Doug's too smart."

"We've just got to get away, before the S. S. gives me the—you know—" she paused again.

It was Ann who broke the silence.

"I'm not sure," she mused, "that I see what the extra hullabaloo's about. Heaven knows, I do want to help you, Connie. But why arouse the Machine's suspicions by refusing to obey orders? As I understand it, there's a considerable interval before the effect of the order starts showing anyhow."

"When you become a *mature,* you may appreciate more exactly how *love* affects two people," Connie declared, in a soft chiding tone. "That is, if you get a chance to meet some male who isn't a drone in spirit, as well as in name. One thing that seems to be pretty important to the other sex is *complete* possession. And now," Connie added, "that I'm in love, I comprehend myself how important it is for a woman to bear the seed of the one person in the universe she lives for—"

At that moment, Doug burst into the hall from the utility corridor where the service robots for the whole communal center were stacked when not needed.

His scarlet drone squad cape was torn, his soaring helmet dented and crushed, and a jagged bleeding scar had been sliced in the flesh above his left eye.

Winkie noticed that his brother no longer had his detonator hooked to his belt.

"Thank God, I'm in time," he said. "Connie, are you all right?"

"Oh, Doug darling." She rushed into his embrace. "I've been so worried."

"Had a run in with psych police, just off Radon Square. Some P. I. B. boys pinned me down. I had to blast my way through them. They've got the alarm out now. If we don't hurry, they'll soon have a net over the entire city. I think there's still one thing in our favor. So far, they don't know that you're involved too, Connie. I hope we can keep it that way."

"If they come here, I can lead them off," Winkie volunteered.

Doug shook his head, doubtfully. "Too dangerous. I'd better say good-by and backtrack a few belts. I've got a kayak cached on the Beta City perimeter that'll get me to the spaceport—"

Connie said, "Doug, I'm going with you."

"No, Connie. I can't let you."

"But Doug—"

"Don't you see, this has changed our plans?" Doug said, his face drawn. "It's cremation now. For me, without a doubt. For you—only if they catch us together. I can't let you take that risk, darling."

"That's a risk I want to share," Connie pleaded. Her chin went up determinedly. "I love you. And I'd rather die now than be mated to a test-tube in a refrigerator—"

Doug surrendered.

"Look, Winkie," he said, turning to his younger brother, "you really think you could lure the psych cops away?" He laid his new-growing arm on Winkie's shoulder. "It's a big assignment. If they nab you, they'll go through your mind with a thousand-toothed comb."

Winkie straightened and inflated his chest. "I'll do it. But you've got to take Ann to Centauri, too. She couldn't stand up under a psych interrogation, like I could—" he attempted to conceal the sudden sentiment and worry he felt—"the girls are weaklings, you know."

"We are not!" Ann objected.

"No time for arguments," said Doug. "Guess you'll have to go with us, baby. It'll break Mother's heart. But, at least, she'll know we're alive—if we make it to the Procyon ship—"

He stripped off his green-visored soaring helmet and his drone squad uniform, tossing them to Winkie. "Try these on for size. You're tall enough to pass for your big brother, already. Keep one sleeve empty."

Winkie pulled the striped trousers over his legs, wriggled into the yellow tunic and draped the scarlet cape over his thin shoulders. The helmet sat well on his head, but he missed the assurance a detonator at his hip would have given him.

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"Take the service corridor," Doug directed. "That's the route the police are bound to follow. As soon as they spot you, jump on a belt headed south. If they start firing, surrender—and I mean, quick."

"Then, it's goodbye?"

"'Fraid so."

Doug gave him a friendly poke; Ann brushed his cheeks with a kiss, and Connie's eyes smiled a vote of thanks that was payment for a hundred risks.

In the next moment, the trio was gone.

WINKIE ducked along the indicated corridor, floated down the first gravity shaft he came to, and emerged from a tunnel opening that brought him abreast of the principal north-south moving belts of Beta City. Whistling to keep up his courage, he waited for Doug's pursuers to arrive in view.

The waiting period lasted less than half as long as he had expected. Two blocks away, he spotted the vanguard of the P.I.B. pursuit, armed men running along the high-speed central conveyors.

A sky-kayak with rotor blades dipped between the buildings, intercepted the squad briefly, then swept on ahead.

Darting into view, Winkie leaped from belt to belt until he had reached the fastest lane. The process afforded his pursuers a new opportunity to close the gap.

Now, they were only a block behind him. The men brandished detonators, but withheld their fire for fear of damagaging the city's transportation system.

After a few more squares, the hunters and hunted neared the southern perimeter of Beta City where the carefully landscaped community merged with flat irrigated fields and occasional hydrophonic gardens. Here, the belt system bore virtually no other passengers.

Ahead of him, Winkie saw the bureau's sky-kayak again dip to the surface; only this time, the craft actually landed on the moving belts. Its pilot jumped out and aimed a long-barreled shining rifle that flashed in the sun.

Green fire suddenly crinkled all over Winkie's body, paralyzing him with stinging torment.

In the next instant, he fell and slid into merciful unconsciousness.

HE AWOKE, strapped in a chair in a dead white room where cold light emanated from a frosted glass ceiling.

Facing him were three P. I. B. investigators, identified by the blue tabs on their epaulets; his school mentor, scowling and grim, and a fifth man in the slate grey denim of a psych technician.

The mentor was saying, "The lad's developed some kind of shield, which makes it hard to break him down. I noticed it on the strip-platform today. Many of these prodigy ungrowns are picking up adult tricks nowadays . . ."

"Have you tried hypno-scopal?" one of the epauleted men asked.

Inquiring eyes turned to the technician for answer. The latter shook his head. "The book rules it out. The dope'd wreck the subject's nervous system."

"The book be damned! Don't you understand? This is a crisis."

The technician shrugged without changing expression. "All right, then. You're running the show."

He prepared an injection, disinfected a bared patch on Winkie's upper arm and shoved in the needle.

Winkie's whole frame shuddered, as the violent chemical made contact with his bloodstream. His head reared back at an insane angle and the pupils of his eyes contracted to pinpoints. The room became a swimming fog of disembodied objects.

"Who gave you that drone squad uniform?" was the first powerful question beamed at his weakened brain, launching the interrogation. "What happened to the others in your clan? Where are they hiding? Speak up, ungrown? Do you want a cremation ticket?"

"I don't know, I tell you! I don't know."

Without mercy the blue-tabbed men continued the grilling. Spoken and mental questions, alternating like the rapid-fire frequency of 60-cycle current, were

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hurled at him.

Winkie felt his shield crumbling. What could one boy do against five men, abetted by a battery of scientific technique? The struggle was hopeless to begin with, complained his agonized mind. Why not give up immediately and spare himself further torture?

"Prepare a second injection, technician," Winkie heard the chief P. I. B. man order. "I'll answer for the consequences."

The needle's jolt was more severe this time. Winkie writhed and screamed as five strange minds crawled through his naked brain, poking in corners he had not even known exisited.

Yet somehow, he managed to hide from their prying the one secret shelf containing the knowledge they sought.

As suddenly as it had begun, the probe was ended, even as he was on the verge of fainting for the third successive time. A new P.I.B. man entered the chamber to report, "We picked up the mother and brought her back. She knew nothing. The conspiracy appears to have been totally unplanned. One of those unpredictable aberrations the Machine can't account for."

"Anything more?"

"One thing. A wrecked skyak was found near the Gamma City spacedrome. Its passengers—and they fit the description we've got—were taken on board a Procyon vessel."

"There's nothing further we can do then," the chief investigator declared, sighing. "Is the ungrown still alive?"

The technician examined Winkie, whose eyelids slowly fluttered open, and nodded.

"Turn him over to the mother. We'll take action later, if the Machine recommends."

WHEN Winkie awoke again, the familar confines of his own sleep cell met his gaze. He looked up to see Mother bending over him; at first, she appeared not to have changed, to be confident and radiant as ever. Then, he discovered in her features a new independent expression he had never seen before, an angered, skeptical expression.

She said, "Was it bad?"

"Not too," he smiled. "Like four or five agony tapes, maybe. No more. But, I didn't tell them. I knew, but I didn't tell. Ann and Doug and Connie are all going to be safe."

"Yes," nodded Mother. "They escaped. On Alpha Centauri, people have a rite called *marriage*—Doug told me. He and Connie are going to ask for that rite, when they get there. But, now you must rest."

"I'm going there someday, myself," said Winkie. "Or to some star in the galaxy, where we don't have to be ruled by a Machine."

"I know you will, Winkie."

His pale forehead creased in thought. "Mother," he said, "you mustn't call me Winkie anymore. Nobody must. From now on, use my real name."

"I'm afraid I don't understand why."

"Don't ask questions," he commanded, surprised at the new vigor he found in his own voice. "Just do it."

"Certainly. I'll meet your request—Winston. How's that?"

"It's a good name, Winston is," he said. "I like the sound of it."

Mother left a second later and he was alone in his cell. He thought of his sister, Ann, somewhere out in space now, gazing at a thousand brilliant suns amid clouds of cosmic dust. Was she thinking of him, now? Was she recalling how her brother had proved he was an *ungrown* in name only, how in all other respects he was already a *mature?* Already a full adult? Some day, years from now, he'd see her again and they'd remember the violent days of their Terran childhood with a laugh.

He slipped out of his jacket and dug his treasured galactic charts out from under the junk chest. Beneath the cell light, his practised eye ran over the vast array of stars and constellations shown.

From now on, he told himself, he would have to study harder than ever—if someday he wanted to be as free as his reason told him every *man* should be. And a man was what he, Winston, had just become.

• • •

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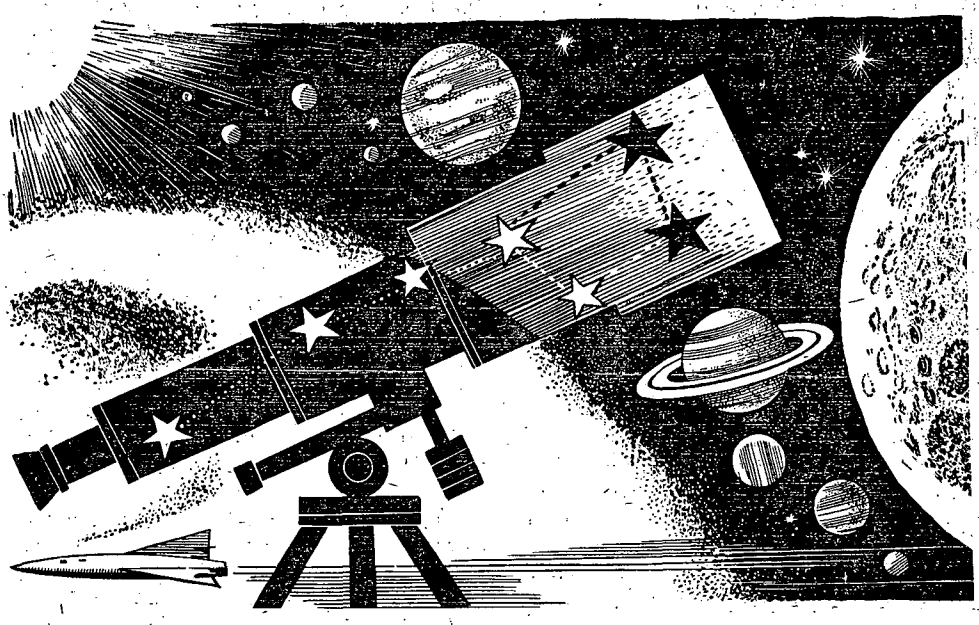
Planets of other stars aren't figments of writers' imaginations. They exist—and their people may be watching our solar system as we observe theirs!



Faraway Planets

By WILLY LEY

IF YOU HAVE been waiting with bated breath for the announcement from the Pentagon of the beginnings of space travel, better start breathing again. It will be a while.

In the year 1952 it was an 'open secret' in New York's science fiction circles that the Army was actively at work on a space satellite as first step in a proposed jump to the moon. That particular bubble was exploded in October when the Pentagon announced that plans for a satellite were actually under consideration back in 1948, but were abandoned a year later because of the cost.

Of course, developments and discoveries and highly confidential work of this nature are apt to be closely hidden during either actually wartime, or a period of cold war such as we are in. Other discoveries, of enormous intrinsic value, are simply crowded out of the papers because they do not match in excitement the daily news of alarums and excursions and political name-calling. Such a discovery was made in the year 1942. Future textbooks will say that the first planet outside our solar system was discovered by a man who joined the U. S. Army immediately afterward and whose

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accomplishment was quite overshadowed by the war news which followed.

Yet the discovery of this faraway planet may have more far-reaching effects on our future and the future of space travel, than the Second World War.

The name of the discoverer of that faraway planet is K. A. Strand and his discovery was, in a way, fitting tribute to the Copernicus Anniversary of 1943.

But the story has to be told in chronological order for proper evaluation. The Copernicus Anniversary of 1943, just mentioned, marked the quadri-centennial of the publication of one of the most important books ever written. It was a volume in Latin, entitled De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelesticum—"On the Revolutions of the Celestial Orbs"—published in Nuremburg in 1543 and written by one Nicholas Koppernick, Latinized Copernicus, then canon of the Roman Catholic cathedral at Frauenberg in East Prussia.

The Copernicus Caper

Copernicus taught, in this book, that Sun and Moon and the planets did not revolve around the Earth, but that the Earth was a planet, accompanied by the Moon, and that it, like all other planets, revolved around the Sun. Six planets were known then: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, in the order of their distance from the Sun. The new concept, after a comparatively short but sharp struggle, won; but it was subject to some changes and additions. Johannes Kepler showed that the orbits of the planets were not circles, as Copernicus had thought, but very short and fat ellipses, looking almost like circles.

Later astronomers increased the number of planets. It was discovered that all the known planets, save for Mercury and Venus, were accompanied by moons. Then an additional planet was discovered in 1781 when Sir William Herschel found Uranus, outside the orbit of Saturn. It was an accidental discovery, and so was the next one. An astronomer who wanted to correct a typographical error in a star catalog looked at a certain section of the sky in the New Year's night of 1800 and discovered the first of the small planets or asteroids which fill the space between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. We know about 1500 of them by now, but that is another story.

Large Uranus, Sir William Herschel's find, was more exciting anyway and astronomers spent much of their time observing it. It was an interesting object, but it did not behave properly. It did not show itself precisely at the spot calculated for its position. In 1845 things got really bad, the planet was two minutes of arc out of place. An angle of two minutes is so small that it can hardly be seen, but astronomers called it an "intolerable quantity" and decided to do something about it.

If the planet's actual position and the most careful calculation of its position did not coincide, something had to be wrong with the calculation. There was a missing factor, presumably the attraction of another planet, unknown, which "perturbed" the orbit of Uranus.

A Frenchman by the name of Leverrier sat down to calculate where such a planet must be, to perturb Uranus the way it did. He mailed his calculations to Johannes Galle in Berlin, who found the planet on the same night, some ten hours after receiving Leverrier's paper. It was Neptune. Later astronomers found out that John C. Adams in England had made the same calculations and that Challis at Cambridge would have found the planet at about the same time, if he had had as complete a star chart of that part of the sky as the one the Germans had just completed when Leverrier's letter arrived.

The point is that this was not an accidental discovery, but a systematic one. Two questions came up at that time. One was whether Neptune was really the outermost planet or whether there were more. And the other concerned the other stars. Spectral analysis, discovered at about the same time, proved that the other stars consisted of the same elements as the star closest to us—our sun. Did those other stars have planets, too?

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As for the first question, Percival Lowell of Flagstaff, Arizona, began to emulate Leverrier and Adams. If there were more planets outside of Neptune's orbit, they should betray their presence in the same manner as Neptune had done. Presumably they could be found the same way. Percival Lowell began to search for them in 1905. The search proved fruitless for many years. In 1914 he published his calculations. In 1916 he died. And in 1930 a young assistant by the name of Clyde Tombaugh succeeded: he discovered Pluto. I may add here that the existence of still another planet outside of Pluto is suspected by some astronomers. But as yet, no proof has been shown.

Now the second question. Did the other stars or suns have planets too? For a while, everybody said "sure." The then current theory was that any star, when reaching a certain age, had to give birth to planets. That theory was termed Stellar Parthenogenesis. According to it a star could deliver planets of itself.

Nebulous Theories

But new theories came into being, with good reason since the old one had quite a number of very weak points. These new theories did not subscribe to Stellar Parthenogenesis any more; they needed two stars that would approach each other closely. Then a hole was found in that new theory, too; the theorists now needed one star approaching a double star. Relationships began to get rather delicate.

At any rate, it seemed as if planetary children should be the exception rather than the rule. Our solar system, bristling with planets, was possibly a freak—only one of three or four such freaks in the whole galaxy and possibly the only one if galactic ethics were high. But then somebody—one Dr. Spitzer—showed an enormous hole in that theory, too. He showed that it was wrong, but he could not suggest anything better. His work resulted in the curious situation that nobody could tell how planets form. Consequently you could think of other stars in whatever fashion pleased you best. Nothing could prevent you from claiming that our solar system was the only one in the whole galaxy. Nor could anybody contradict you if you assumed that each star had one.

The other stars are much too far away for us to see their planets. There was absolutely no way of telling.

There exists a constellation which is often called the Northern Cross, although its original name is Cygnus, the Swan. In that constellation there is a rather obscure binary—a double star, two suns whirling around each other at close range. That "star" in question is, or was, so unimportant that even a good astronomer, when hearing the designation, would not know more about it than what the designation itself says. K. A. Strand, for some reason, was interested in that star and he noticed that the orbits of the component suns were not smooth; they were definitely perturbed. The visible objects did not account for their motion.

The conclusion was obvious. If the visible objects could not account for the motions it had to be an invisible object—a dark object, possibly a planet.

All-Star Mystery

Strand set about to disentangle the perturbations on paper, much in the same manner as Leverrier and Adams had disentangled the perturbations of Uranus' orbit. The job is tedious, to say the least, but when it was accomplished the figures stated that there was a dark object there, an object 16 times as heavy as Jupiter. Now Jupiter's diameter is about one tenth of the diameter of our Sun, but Jupiter itself has a very low density. A planet weighing 16 times as much as Jupiter would not need to be much larger than the biggest planet of our system, provided it consisted of denser elements. At any event, it is a planet and not a dwarf sun.

Strand's calculation discovered the first planet of another sun, a dark and gigantic planet, but a planet. We know that it exists and that makes it look

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again as if planets might not be such rare freaks as a lot of theorists felt they must be. Maybe the method by which a solar system comes into existence is quite simple and non-catastrophic, only unknown.

The First Visit

But Strand's discovery has another important effect. Astronomers have now tasted blood. Strand's discovery has already led the way to two similar ones, and it seems likely that in the comparatively near future still more will be made. At any rate, we now know that extra solar planets are indeed very common. I don't know the figures, but I believe that Jupiter's mass might be sufficient to perturb the path of our Sun a bit. Theoretically it has to do it, the only question is whether the amount is observable. If Sirius has a planet with astronomers that are as patient as ours—and all astronomers just have to be—and equipped with instruments as good as ours, they might be able to measure a slight wobbling of the Sun's path, a wobble that takes a little less than 12 years to return to its original position.

If that has happened—if another civilized race lives out there within good seeing range of our star—then it is a certainty that we will meet sooner or later. The only question is: Which of us will pay the first visit?

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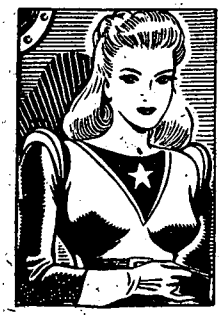

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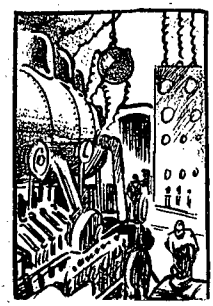

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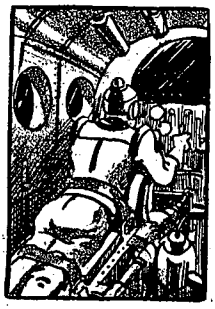

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Kuttner
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Brackett
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They accused him of being asleep, but Jig had to prove to his alien critics that only a man asleep has the conviction of his dreams. . . .

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FULFILLMENT

a novelet

By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

I DIDN'T go up with the package. I wanted to. God, how I wanted to. But the Government stepped in; they wouldn't hear of it. I was the man who had roughed out the whole project—Project Space Station. Only the strong glue of my personality could hold it together, they told me. So they didn't want to lose me.

It isn't every day that man, that great, ignobly noble creature, takes his first step out of his earth cradle. Those first two hours after our four-stager blasted up, I paced.

Occasionally in the tower, the radar men picked up a blip. Mostly they lost it. The telescope men had trouble from the first. Finally the whole sky became overcast, and Rainier gave me a kick in the pants with his hammy foot and told me I was dead. So I went home, and when I got there I began drinking.

Cathy had a drink or two with me, like a dutiful wife. Then, apprehensively, she stopped.

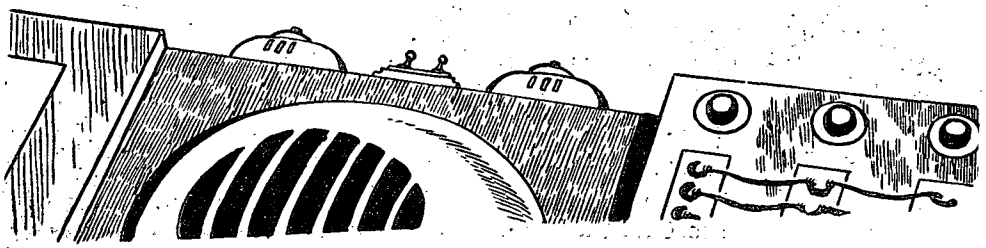
"Sure, sure," I said. "You have to keep an eye on me. For ten blissful years you've had to keep an eye on me."

Cathy's eyes were faded. Cathy's lips had wrinkles around them. Not from laughing. Cathy's hair was stringy blonde. Cathy had a torn black satin blouse on and torn green cotton slacks on and torn dirty red mukluks on. Cathy tried to laugh, her eyes shifting. It was an awkward laugh, an awkward eye-shift.

"You're just not sure about the ship," she said defensively. "You're mad at me and yourself. You shouldn't be under that strain. You've been under that same strain twenty years. You'd think after a while you'd get tired of it."

"Women." I turned over on the couch and stared at the wall. I was in that climbing rocket. "If it was up to women, we'd still be stuck in Earth mud. But don't get me wrong, Cathy. I love you." So maybe I did.

Cathy sniffed and clonked out of the room. I woke up a little later, and I remember seeing Cathy with her hair combed, and her face made up like an angel's, and a dress on that would knock your eyes out. "Sweet l'il wife," I mumbled, making like a drunk, and when I woke up again there was a ringing at the doorbell and that was enough to get me up. I pulled open the door and Quincy came in in a burst of rain.



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He shucked off his raincoat, dispiritedly dropped it someplace. My heart went down to my boots. Still no word, no radar pick-up, no nothing.

"They made it to the orbit, though," said Quincy. "I figured it too close for any mistake." He sat down nervously, crossed long skinny legs, tapped a cigarette.

"Where's Cathy?" he said, looking around. A casual question; too casual.

"Cathy!" I bawled.

No Cathy.

"Cathy went out," I said unhappily. "Friend." I poured a gloomy drink.

Quincy's eyes shifted. Blue eyes. Sick blue eyes. I hated to hurt him. When you've worked with a man twenty years, driven him, wrung every last ounce out of him because you've shared the same dream, you don't let up on him. You can't. The dream becomes more important than the men in it. So I hurt him.

"I might ask where Marcia is," I said. "Out with lover-boy?"

His lips slacked, then twisted at me. I said brutally, "Don't hate me, Quince. Hate the facts, if you want. Then for your own peace of mind do a switch. This life down here isn't reality, *there's* reality." I shot my arm straight up. "The planets. After that the stars. That's what man was made for. Why worry yourself over a—"

"Don't say it."

"Okay." So I didn't say it. Then the 'phone rang, and sure enough it was the field.

"Better get over here fast, Jig!" Rainier's voice barked at me. "Where in hell have you been? There's trouble—"

"The ship," I yelled, agonized. "What happened to the ship?" But he'd hung up.

I yelled at Quince to write a note to Cathy, and then I scrabbled in the cupboard for raincoat and cap. When I came out, he had his raincoat on, and hadn't written a note to Cathy.

"Don't worry about Cathy," he said. "She'll do all right." He turned toward the door, but I grabbed him.

"What about Cathy?" I grated.

"I saw her down at the drugstore. Under the canopy. Talking with her boyfriend. I think you ought to know."

"Yeah?"

"I don't know his name," said Quince. "But then, why bother? That's not the *real* reality, is it?" He broke away and went hunching into the rain. I followed numbly. A minute later his car squealed away from the curb and whooshed onto sixty-six. Quince drove hard and fast and I sat still. We didn't talk.

WHEN we got onto the field I saw that the ship had come down, one-third as short as she'd gone up lugging her load. She was minus the four stages. That wasn't trouble. Up there, she'd dumped the load!

There were half a dozen men in the office when I slammed in, Quince trailing. Two of them were top-flight from Washington, the other four worked with Quince and me. Rainier was hunched, red-haired and tubby, behind my desk, his red skullcap pushed back on his head.

He waved to a couple of empty chairs. We sat. He indicated the two top-flighters. "You both know Mr. Koenig—Mr. Vickories," he said in a distantly calm voice.

"Yeah," I said, facing them with my hands braced on my knees and looking them over. "I thought we had a go signal. I thought the government was satisfied. I thought we had their promise no more interference. So now there's trouble."

Koenig, the one I was talking at, didn't even seem to hear me. Everybody was thinking. Rainier's fingers drummed as if he was a million miles off.

Finally he did speak. "The government isn't interfering, Jig. They respect our contract. But we've been interfered with from another direction. It's a little hard to take—harder to believe."

I was jittering, and getting sore. "Listen," I said. "The ship's down, the load's up. We're ready for the next load. It goes up on schedule if I have to start

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beating heads together. Every blankety-blank girder and blister section and generator and FM radio plug—every one I feel like I made with my own hands. You know that. You know I've worked like a dog for this one thing, spending my life on it. *Nobody's interfering.* I don't care who they are!

"Now tell me. *Did* the load go up in the assembly orbit? Is it waiting up there? Yes or no."

"Yes *and* no." Rainier's big fist lifted up the 'phone. "See if Whitey can come in again."

Then we were all silent again, until the door opened. I jumped up and grabbed Whitey. "You did it, man!" I chortled. "Congratulations." I wrung his hand, but there was rage in the grip and Whitey knew it. He yanked his mangled hand away. Rainier gave me a look, his lips compressed.

"Break it to him gently, Whitey—" he said—"like a mallet over the head. And I hope he drops through the floor."

"We got interfered with," said Whitey coldly. "We cut the load free on schedule, in the proper orbit, the one Quincy gave us, and then started dropping back. About that time two space ships took over."

"Yeah?" said I.

"Yeah. They materialized suddenly. Pretty to watch. Then they cut the package down the middle, and each space ship headed back to Earth with half a package."

"What did they cut them with?"

"Conjoining rays I suppose. I didn't see any rays. All I know is the package got cut right down the middle. Then other rays—I guess—took hold of them. We kept on dropping back."

"It's the truth," Rainier said studiedly. "Fifteen minutes after the ship landed we got word long distance from somebody in Burbank. The two halves of the package were dumped in a vacant spread near a housing project in the San Fernando Valley."

The Big Jump

THE time is close when man will at last make that first huge step off the surface of his planet. And then will become reality all the talk and guesses and hypotheses about what lies beyond. It may all turn out to be ridiculously easy—or it may hold even more unguessed terrors.

Faced with the unknown, man is like a child again, but a child who has never listened very carefully to the cautioning of his elders, who is rebellious, argumentative, pugnacious and downright unreasonable. Out of which appalling character pattern comes some of his most effective sorties.

Objective and intelligent aliens, regarding homo sapiens critically, might be pardoned for sneering at what man calls "fulfillment." See how close you come to agreeing with Mr. Rocklynne's sanguine views.

—The Editor

I SAT down, numb again. I started thinking longingly of Cathy. I don't know why. The two things tied together somehow. Invaders from space. Flying saucers. Little green men having rendezvous with witchy wives under drug-store canopies—well, well. I began sinking lower in my seat.

I was getting fighting mad.

I said, "That's all very interesting. But I repeat: I'm head of this project. It's part of my body. Nobody's interfering."

The two government men exchanged glances, then Koenig said hesitantly,

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"It's all according to who's interfering, Jig. There's more to this story. Five hours ago—before the ship landed—before word was received about the package being laid down out West—I woke up and saw writing on the wall. My wife saw it, too.

"It was in big enough print to read from where I was—I was just dozing on the couch. A projector of some kind must have thrown it on the wall, only there was no projector. I copied it down if you want to read it," he added. I was across the room and snatched it.

It read, "Mr. Koenig: Kindly confer with me at Trig Field at 11:30 PM EST regarding inadvisability of attempting space travel from Earth. Bar Insu."

"Fake!" I said.

"I'm afraid not, Jig. Anyway, I didn't think so. That's why I came. When I heard about the load being dumped I knew it wasn't a fake. Anyway—" he turned up his wrist—"it's 11:27 now."

A rapping, a tapping, at my parlor door.

"So we're up against something, Jig," said Rainier. "And it's big. For the moment, it seems to be bigger than we are. I know how you feel. We all have dreams of going to the other planets, to the stars—of expanding man's horizon to include his natural heritage. The whole world feels the same way. Every civilized nation has been watching us.

"But we're in the middle of formulating an equation again. Us, our dreams to build a space station as the first step to the stars, and an opposing force known as X. If we take it easy, we'll find out the nature of X—and get to the stars anyway."

"Yeah," I said, and then I leaned over my desk, shoved Rainier's stomach back out of the way and jerked open a drawer. I took out a snub-nosed Smith-Wesson automatic and stuck it in my pocket. "Add this to the equation," I said. "Just in case." Everybody looked, nobody said anything. I sat down.

A rapping, a tapping, at my office door.

I got up.

Koenig nodded grayly when I looked at him. "If you want," he said.

I didn't want to. But I did.

"Good evening," said Bar Insu.

HOW do you describe him? You don't. All you wanted to do was smash in his face so he couldn't be described. Anyway, those were my feelings. And let's admit it, I don't know anybody who hated them as much or as instantly as I did, even later on, when they began coming to Earth in their dozens, their hundreds.

How do you describe them? Power. Brutal power that can leap to where it's going, without leakage or dispersion. No vacillation. No mincing. No equivocation. Instant, unchanging decision.

Men? Yes, they were shaped like men. Bronzed, with subtly irridescent scale effects when the light hit them right. Heads shaved clean and shiny, to the temples, heads shaped long like watermelons. But men? This Bar Insu was not a man as we know men. The soul of man was missing; that high, fine and mighty fixture that brought him up out of the muck to knock at the door of space. Man, with all his raptures and attendant sufferings. This Bar Insu knew of the "glory of man," and was utterly unimpressed by it.

Some of this I know now. Some I knew then.

I hated him.

He came into the room, dropped off his raincoat, stood revealed in a stark black, unpatterned business suit. His face was frozen. He showed no courtesy, nor intention toward courtesy.

"We have been to Earth before," he said abruptly, and did not go into details. Thereafter each word he said meant something. No icing. No apology.

"You Earth people," he said, "have, in your way, tried. But you are not yet ready for space."

I said interestedly, "I haven't heard anything or seen anything that could stop us. We'll get into space if we have to invent weapons to do it."

Rainier said sharply, "Jig!"

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BAR INSU turned thick-lidded eyes on me. For a moment I felt I was looking into a furnace. He said, "There are many among the human race who have nothing to say. Their brains are stuffed with pickled phrases. Their ideas are not ideas at all, but conclusions. Their conclusions are encased in preservatives so they cannot be violated. Their propelling force comes from the rapid subconscious repetition of slogans. Yet that is the type of man who sometimes leads you."

I tensed, but Insu's glance moved away from me. I waited for more of it. I wanted more of it. Cathy and now this. Try me once more.

Bar Insu spoke to Koenig, his voice muted, but with a ring in it, like a piece of metal struck.

"I know what you all think," he said. "You will try to find out who I am, where I come from, what powers I and my race wield. You will listen, study, attempt to place me in a comfortable thought-niche. You will then think how to defy me and my edict.

"This will all be impossible, *utterly* impossible. For you are all asleep. I see you as if you know nothing. *You know nothing*—and therefore are not even children. You are barely aware of being alive. If my words seem cruel, I can only say that someday you will know they are not cruel.

"The unalterable edict is that you are forbidden the conquest of space until you are worthy of space."

I kept silent. There was bitter laughter in me. I watched the others. Rainier's broad face turning dull red, Koenig's whole expression tense on each word, Whitey vapidly amazed, and Quince—Quince apparently not even listening.

Koenig cleared his throat. Bar Insu pushed his words back with a motion of his hand. Then his eyes narrowed. Silver flecks appeared in them—and somehow I thought of a scalpel, cutting quickly and deep.

"You, the human race, have sought to set up a space station without first setting up such stations in yourselves.

"You must learn to become *conscious of yourselves* before we can allow you to leave Earth. The power that I represent will allow no infant race to bring its disordered mentality into the interstellar sphere. There will never again be interstellar war.

"For this reason, men from my sphere will come, and over a period of subjective time, awaken your sleeping race. This can be, however, only with your permission. If you refuse, you shall never leave Earth's atmosphere. You have ten seconds for an answer."

He waited, his hands folded. I gagged. I think everybody must have gagged. Because, nobody said anything. Insu laughed, a laugh deep down and almost inaudible.

"Who of you has proved he is not asleep?" he asked. "You had all the facts. To an awakened mentality, ten seconds would be sufficient."

Koenig flushed. "I don't consider myself asleep. I represent a large number of people, and I do not think it advisable—"

Insu made a winging motion with his hands; then his shoulders lifted up in a shrug, as if he were using an unfamiliar mannerism.

"This is not of the slightest importance. You have no answer. This is understandable. You have as many 'I's as you have thoughts, feelings, desires. Your ego is broken up into thousands upon thousands of different 'I's—few of which are aware of the others' existence. This is partly what I mean by 'sleep.' You are not self-conscious—*because you have no permanent self.*"

RAINIER was at the bursting point. He ominously pressed his skullcap onto the desk. He said, "I get it. We've had our wrists slapped. 'Don't touch. You've got a lot to learn. You've got to go to school.' Is that it?"

"A school? No. *Not yet. A kindergarten.*"

Rainier's larded face swelled. Insu made that winging motion again, and then ignored Rainier. He let his glance

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move around the circle of us—until it rested on Quince. And then I woke up to Quince. Quince, our ballistics expert, who'd figured the power-lift per ton of weight, who'd figured the ship's firing area, who'd calculated ship trajectory and the assembly orbit.

Quince, sitting in a corner, taking it all in, not saying anything, not thinking anything, so far as I knew. Quince, with relaxed, dreamy lips—doing some concentrated suffering over Marcia. Quince, not caring, and very, very tired.

And Insu, looking at him.

Why?

I began to jitter. And I was scared. As if Insu was looking not at Quince, but into him. And knowing something none of us knew.

Finally it got Quince, too. His dreamy lips tightened.

"I have nothing to add," he said distinctly.

There was a flicker of tiny muscles on Insu's bronzed face; as if he had registered an emotion foreign to us. Then he picked up his raincoat and headed for the door. Koenig stopped him, his voice harsh.

"One moment, Mr. Insu!" And I saw then that sweat was rolling down his face. "If I do have this sleeping mentality you accuse us of, then you must treat it as such. I must ask questions."

"Questions alter nothing. You have the facts."

"Question—" said Koenig doggedly —"what if we used our considerable mechanical knowledge, and used weapons to *force* our way into space?"

"At your present rate of progress, *of any kind—*" Insu's voice compressed the words peculiarly—"it would be a half-million years before you could do so. For *you know nothing.*"

"We have knowledge." Koenig's face was flaming.

"It is false knowledge."

Insu opened the door.

Koenig interposed, his voice thick with suppressed anger.

"My instincts tell me to defy you. But I am, instead, making an effort that is almost beyond me. There is nothing to keep you or others like you off this planet. Immigration laws are only between nations. You may come here—if you come in peace. You have my answer."

Insu was on the other side of the door. The door was closing.

"It is no answer," he said clearly. "It is merely a passing thought made by one of your 'I's.' Before I finish speaking, another of your 'I's will arise to tell you you did wrong. As for the implication you make—it had already occurred to me. Good night." The rain blew. He was gone.

Koenig's face was still colored. His eyes hooded. Vickories and he got into their raincoats. Then Koenig must have walloped himself into making a decent exit. Slowly he brought his head up, and for a half-minute made a point of meeting our eyes, one by one.

"He's right, you know," he said, very softly. "He's more than right. I regretted what I said, as soon as I said it . . . for fear of what others would think. But I know my answer now. We're asleep, and don't know it. No man could crawl around on the surface of this planetary bughouse without realizing we're not ready for space—not just yet, at least."

"That means," I said politely, "that you intend to help Insu keep us out of space?"

He laughed. "My dear man, he doesn't need any help. Don't you realize you don't stand a chance?"

"No," I said.

He looked at me. Something happened to his shoulders. They slumped. Perplexity set in deep at the corners of his lips.

"I'm human, Jig," he said slowly. "So are we all. Sometimes there is something above and beyond pure logic. We all know man is great. If he could get into space despite Insu's people—" He played with the thought. "It would be proving something. I don't know what exactly. Maybe just that we're human. But my other opinions still stand."

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SO HE left us with that "warm feeling" and I kicked the door shut after him.

"Wait a minute," said Rainier, sharply. "Don't go up in smoke just yet, Jig."

"Why not?" I snapped. "We're being bulldozed, insulted, kicked."

He scraped irritably at his jawline, twisted his face thoughtfully out of shape. So I shut up. Rainier thought some more—with his whole face.

Then he got up and paced. The office shook.

"Damndest thing," he said. "Sometimes a big *new* idea comes along—an idea outside the pattern we've lived in all our lives—and we tend to miss it. When it could be valuable. A super-race offering to give us something for free—something that could be tremendous."

I cut in. "Back up, ace. Look at me. *Look* at me, Rainey. Into my eyes. *Am I asleep?*"

"Well, no, put that way, you aren't. But—"

"But nothing," I said, bulling my voice at him. "Don't let it throw you. We're the human race, remember? We can beat anything. And that's a promise. Let's meet here tomorrow and decide how we're going to beat that slob."

"Okay." Rainier jerked his shoulders, threw up his hands. "It's your baby."

The others reacted after awhile. The concensus was yes. I was wobbling like a punch-drunk fighter planning a comeback when I hauled Quince out the door.

Cathy was home. The lights were on. I sat in the car with Quince for a while, watching his set features. The pull of my eyes brought his face around. He forced a smile.

"It doesn't get you at all, does it, Jig?" he asked curiously. "You just don't have emotions like that. All you think about is up there. The planets."

"You're wrong," I told him flatly. "It's eating me up. But I don't let it get me. I told you where reality was. It's not Cathy; it's not Marcia. Okay, so what if your private lives don't work out? You and I have the stars ahead of us. That's the big fight. So pull yourself together. Looks like we're in the same boat—and no oars."

His smile came at me crookedly. "Yes, Jig," he said. I got out of the car, watched him drive away. And then I caught that derisive note in "Yes, Jig." So I had a funny feeling about it. And I got to thinking about Insu, the way he'd given Quince a going-over. As if Insu, too, saw that big, driving hate in Quince's tall and skinny body. A hate big enough, and unmanageable enough, to destroy—anything.

I shivered, but not from the damp night air. *Maybe I should junk Quince.*

In the house, Cathy came at me, smiling apprehensively. She snuggled her arms around me. She looked straight into my eyes. "I love you, Jig," she said. *Yeah,* thought I. She moved in at me with a slow wriggle. "I'm sorry I was cross." She kissed me. "How did the ship make out?"

I told her everything. Except about Quince seeing her boyfriend. . . .

She sat down near the television set, looking for a minute at her arched toe in its silken stocking. My throat got an ache in it. Heaven help me, I thought, she's real. Then she looked up; her nose pinched. "Jig," she asked curiously, "what do you think of our marriage?"

"Think of it? I don't think. I know. You're mine, and that's in the contract. Think it over, kiddo," and I went toward the bedroom, shucking off my shirt. But she caught up with me, swung me around.

"Just what do you mean by that, Jig?"

"You know exactly what I mean." Then it got me. I shook her by the shoulders. I told her what Quince had told me. She slapped my hands away.

"Quince told you a thing like that?" she said incredulously. "And you believed him—knowing the trouble he's been having with Marcia?"

"Sure," I snarled. "The husband's always the last one to know, isn't he?"

"He's a dirty, lying, *thing!*" she said indignantly. "I was just standing there. Watching the rain and waiting for it to let up. I saw Quince and I waved at

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him. I got all dressed up because you *never* take me out and I never get a chance to get dressed up. It wasn't raining then. I—I—" She started crying angrily. I tried to calm her, to apologize, to make it up to her. No good.

The fight lasted three hours.

I won.

AT THE field, we laid low for a couple of days, doing nothing, carrying pieces of paper around to make ourselves think we were busy. At the end of two days, the shock of Insu's appearance wore off. We perked up. Quince, too. I called a meeting. Rainier came into the office with an extra lift in his step. He showed me a telegram. It was from the Big Time Realty Company, Los Angeles, asking us to get our property off their land. I told Rainier to get a freighting company busy hauling the stuff back here.

We all sat down, our feet up. Quince was reading a newspaper. "Keeping up with the news?" he asked.

"No!" said I. Rainier looked at me oddly.

"You ought to," he said briefly. "Know who your enemies are, at least."

"I know who my enemies are," I said. "And I've learned to get my news first hand, not from goddamn liars."

Quince's face began to get red. "How's Marcia, Quince?" I said.

"Fine," he said, his voice muffled. He tried to switch it. "They've landed." He rattled the paper.

"Who's landed?"

"Men from the stars. Men coming in ships that go away in the night. Men from the stars taking over hotel rooms. And the government letting them."

"Yeah?" My hackles were going up from two directions. "Koenig brought them in."

Rainier tossed his skullcap up in the air, diddling. "Nope. Koenig just gave them a law to go by—and did some talking on the side to his colleagues."

"How does he know they're not here to conquer the planet?" I demanded. "It's still treason, no matter how he justifies it."

"Treason, schmeason," said Rainier. "They don't carry weapons. And they seem to be just men. Anyway, Insu is taking advantage of the publicity value. Apparently they can keep themselves on the front pages indefinitely." He took the paper from Quince, saying, "And they're getting into radio and television. Listen to this. Insu in an interview." He read:

"'Certainly my previous statement that man is asleep stands. He walks around in a condition of waking sleep very little different from ordinary sleep. In waking sleep, you of Earth merely have a more critical attitude toward your impressions; your thoughts are more connected, you discipline your actions more effectively. But it is still sleep. None of you has true self-consciousness. And objective consciousness—that is a state of mind we shall not even attempt to describe.

"'But you *are* asleep—and if, after having been told this, you still insist you are not, *then you are lying.*'"

I made a rubbery sound with my lips. Quince shifted uneasily.

"That's for Insu, not you, Quince," I said, too kindly.

Rainier was beginning to pick it up. He looked hard at me. "There's something around here that smells," he said. "Cut it out, Jig."

Quince's hands were shaking. He grabbed the paper back from Rainier, and started reading scattered sections of it. It seemed that universities, high schools, grade schools, and elementary schools were requesting lecture dates from Insu's men. Insu was complying.

"Oh, they'll get away with it," Rainier said, watching Quince and then me, puzzledly. "Shock value. People don't like to be called liars—unless it entertains them. This is real entertainment—men from some other planet telling us we're loopy."

QUINCE let the paper fall. "Yes," he said. "But how do you think the public is going to react when a bunch of

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helpless kids are told that if they don't watch out they'll learn to lie to themselves just like their parents do; that their imaginations are destructive, that they talk too much?"

"Ever been a helpless kid, Quince?" I asked. "Ever been in a situation that hurt so much you had to take your hate out on somebody else?"

Quince's head came around slowly. Then his eyes blazed. He sailed the paper across the room and said an unprintable, short word.

My feet came down with a bang. "And let's face it, Quince. There *could* be a little less chatter in the world, a little less lying, a little less imagination—like imagining men meeting somebody's wife—"

He was on his feet, yelling. "He was there," he yelled.

"Yes," I said, still sitting down. "A little man with a paunch and a mustache and a bottle of cologne under his arm for his wife—just a guy caught in the rain and waiting for his wife to drive over and get him. That's all it was, Quince. And you had to make something big out of it, because—"

"Don't say it," he warned, his voice trembling.

Rainier swore. "Break it up, kids." He forcibly dumped Quince back into a chair. He turned his head around to me, shaking it minutely, and winked. Then he lit into me, verbally, calling me every name under the sun. He told me if I ever needled a good guy like Quince again, he'd institute a new form of propulsion to the Moon—a good kick in the pants. He winked again, so I went over and humbly apologized to Quince. I held out my hand. It took him a long time to take it. But we shook.

By that time, I wasn't feeling much like a hero. "I'm sorry, Quince," I said. And I guess I meant it. "We all got troubles."

I sank back into my chair and buried myself in the paper. After a while, the print came into focus again.

"Man," Bar Insu said, "is a machine. Exactly why he is a machine will be covered in a television broadcast in which I have been asked to participate. But if, after having been given this information, any man then denies he is a machine, he will be proving the existence of the automatic mechanism by which he moves, eats, breathes, invents, discovers, writes, paints, lives."

I put the paper down, shaking my head. "This wraps a ribbon around it," I said, trying without much success to sound natural. "Insu's got the perfect argument. If you don't believe him, that's proof he's right." I read the paragraph out loud.

Quince made an effort, all right. "Yet, how often does a person know he's dreaming, Jig? In the dream it's cockeyed but it's real—"

"Cut it out," I snapped, playing the effort back. "Let's not fall for it, huh? I'm going out into space—with your help, Quince—Rainey. That's a promise."

"How?" Quince's blue eyes were suddenly boring into mine, burning.

"Yeah, *how?*" Rainier said disconsolately. I knew what he was thinking: "You can't. They're superior. They'll keep us down—until they think we're ready to go up." I ignored that.

I leaned back, hands behind my head, looking at the ceiling. And I did what I thought was some mighty clear thinking.

"It isn't the *how* that's important," I said slowly, "it's the *why*. Koenig had the answer to that. First of all, of course, it's important for us, personally, to realize a dream we've had all our lives. But it's more important in another way—because we happen to be *men*. Whatever our failings as a species, the great and glorious thing about it is that, in spite of those failings, in spite of—anybody who thinks they can stop us, we are on the verge of space travel. On our own.

"That's our fulfillment as a species, guys. *One little ship on the Moon.* Go ahead and deny it."

"I can think offhand of a few other ways we should fulfill ourselves—" said Rainier casually.

"Damn you," I said indignantly.

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"—so get down off the soap box. I doubt if we could stop this project if we wanted to. The wheels are greased for another take-off. What's your plan?"

I told them.

The next day we went to work.

THE Insu men had the front pages all right. And they'd taken over the networks as well. I was downright sick getting home that night. Newsboys screeching their own doom. Radios blatting junk. Cathy nervously put dinner on, then said, as nervously, "You ought to read the paper, Jig—and there's a television program on tonight—"

"No television tonight," I said.

Her face got like the Sphinx. "Don't answer so mechanically," she said. "You react as if I pushed a button. I *knew* you'd react like that. I'm watching television."

I clattered a fork. She clattered one too. I started to leave the table. Then I decided that was a button. I stayed. Her head came up. "You might as well know it, Jig. I've changed. I'm not going to be at the mercy of your negative emotions anymore."

"My *what?*" Then I got it. I roared.

She leaned across the table, dipping her blouse in the gravy. She bared her teeth. "Neg-a-tive e-mow-shons," she said. "Is that plain enough? Do you know what they are? How stupid they are? How *utterly* useless? How much time we waste on them? How we build all our art and our motion pictures and our plays and our books and *everything* around them? And how wonderful we could be if we didn't *adore* them so much?"

Holy cats. "Darling," I said. "I love you. You're terrific."

So we watched television. The whole country watched television. Bar Insu got on the air. After it was over, all I had to do was watch Cathy.

"Well, it sounded reasonable to me," she said angrily.

"Wait a minute," I said.

"Wait a minute nothing!" she stormed. "He's right. You think you can possess me. Nobody can possess anything—except himself. And nobody even possesses himself. Nobody knows himself. And I've *let* you possess me. I've been in love with you. I thought there was something good in you. I've been afraid to hurt your feelings. But I know it isn't your feelings I've been protecting, it's mine. It's just identification—"

"Whoops, my dear," said I, sinking lower in my seat. "For the sake of sweet marital sanity I hope the other wives in the country aren't taking to it as big as you."

"*What* marital sanity?" she asked. "Where is it? Who's got it? I want some of it!"

"What you're missing," I started to point out.

"The human race is glorious?" she asked politely.

"Shut—up." I put my hands on my knees and stared her down. "Listen. Just listen. This guy just said a few things that passed through your lovely, fluffy head." I ticked them off on my fingers. "One: The Law of the Conservation of Energy is haywire. Two: The Second Law of Thermodynamics doesn't explain the facts, and therefore is inapplicable to our universe. Three: Action and reaction are only two forces of a triad. *And* four: *The musical scale —do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do—is the basic equation on which the universe is built!*"

She fiddled uncertainly with the mending on her lap. "I don't know about that," she said sullenly. "All I know is—"

I had her. I jammed my slippers on and started for the bedroom. "All you know is *nothing,*" I told her, sore. "Don't go picking out all the things you like and use it on me without trying to get the whole picture. If his science is built on false premises, you can suspect the rest of him."

"Identifying again?" she called after me, her voice harsh. "Acting like a machine again?"

So I slammed the door.

After I slammed it, I turned around

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and looked at it. Slammed doors. How many man hours, and woman hours for that matter, used in slamming doors? What did the door have to do with it? Was I mad at the door? Mad at Cathy? Mad at me?

Maybe.

I gave my pillow an extra vicious punch and went to sleep rolling and tossing and wondering what the hell.

In the morning when I woke, Cathy was gone. Cathy and two suitcases. She'd written a note. Not the kind of note I could expect from Cathy. This wasn't the Cathy who'd taken what I had to give her for ten years. Not the Cathy who considered my feelings above everything else. Just "I won't be back, Jig." That's all.

I burned the toast.

BY THE time I got to the office, I was raving mad. Then I discovered Quince had worked all night. He was haggard.

"Plans," he said. He shoved them at me. "Just like you suggested. The third stage to fall off is our rocket to the Moon."

"Our?"

"I'm going with you," said Quince. "You and I. First men on the Moon."

His face was blank, his eyes were glazed. I wrung his hand. "Thanks, Quince," I said huskily. "You're not sore about anything?"

"Sore?" He studied me out of one eye. "What should I be sore about? Done anything bad to me, Jig?"

"Well—no," I said awkwardly. Then, seeing the turn the conversation was taking, I added, "Forget it. I was just making talk."

"No, let's not forget it," he insisted. "Let's clear it up. Come to think of it—" he pinched thoughtfully at his jaw—"I am sore at you for something. For controlling me."

Controlling you?" Then I got it. "Insu!" I said.

"Insu? Hmm. Maybe. I guess I didn't realize it, until Insu came along. For twenty years you've been controlling me. Taking me over. Messing into my private thoughts. Accepting my ideas, rejecting my ideas. Telling me where I was wrong, insisting I was wrong. Making me work like a dog just because you worked like a dog. Making me accept this same crazy insanity about going to the planets—all because you paid me a salary."

"Boy, you *are* sore at me," I said. *He's been up all night; he's sick at heart, don't react.*

"But that's your way of life," continued Quince, studying me dreamily. "And it seems to be the way of the rest of the world. Everybody trying to control everybody else. Everybody trying to suck up somebody else's individuality. Mothers force unwanted food down their children's mouths with threats, bribes and spankings. Fathers get out the antiquated moral code book as soon as their daughters show enough spunk to stay out five minutes after curfew. Wives forced to love, honor and obey. Husbands who think they can think for their wives—looking on their wives as nothing but dumb blondes—"

It was getting to me. "Okay," I said harshly. "You're getting back at me. That's fine. I'm glad you're going to the Moon with me. You know I can't make it alone. You know there'll be a bit of navigation needed after we drop off. But let's forget that other junk, huh?"

He toyed with a pencil, studying me with that glaze in his eyes. It made me nervous. I leaned closer over him, shook him by the shoulder. "You're dead, Quince," I snapped. "Go on home. Get some sleep. Will you—for my sake?"

"Controlling me again." He shook his head. He wouldn't go home. Wouldn't hear of it. Had to get to the foundry. Had to order parts. Quick. Rainier came in. He took me to one side, talking out of the corner of his mouth.

"My advice, let him alone. He's been acting funny. Marcia. She's driving him crazy—or himself crazy. He wants to get away from her—from everything. That's why he wants to go to the Moon. I gave him a drink to pep him up." We

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drifted toward the reception office.

"It didn't pep him up," I said indignantly. "It just gave him the guts to light into me. Who else could we get for the math work?"

"Nobody. Worried?"

"Not exactly. Quince'll come out of it. If he doesn't, he gets scrapped."

RAINIER leaned on a window sill, looking out over the field toward the runway and Governor's Hill. He overhanded a cigarette into his mouth, his heavy face sad. "Ever think of it that way, Jig? Too many problems here on Earth. Get out to the planets. A coward's way. Adventure. Excitement. Satisfaction of curiosity. A narcotic to dull our despairs. Something to force out the woes and tribulations that beset all of us. But after the excitement is gone we go out and get new problems—new despairs. We drag them in. I've seen it happen."

"You *mean* that?"

"No," he said. Then he paused. "What do I mean? Which 'I' is speaking? How come, Jig, we all have so darned many 'I's? Things in us that say one thing, promise one thing, and then ten seconds later do a switch. What happened to the first 'I'? How come they aren't in contact with each other?"

So I took him across the street and bought him a drink.

Two drinks.

Three drinks.

He raised the empty glass. "All my doubting 'I's have disappeared," he said kindly. "The alcohol group of 'I's have come to the surface. Ah, Jig, boy, we're going to the Moon. Damn Insu and his icon-busting ideas."

Ten minutes later, 'I' didn't care about Cathy, 'I' loved Cathy, but 'I' hated Cathy. 'I' wanted Cathy back, but 'I' hoped she wouldn't ever come back. 'I' wanted to go to the Moon, 'I' wanted to go to the Moon, 'I' wanted to go to the Moon, 'I' thought it wasn't too important after all. So I had another drink.

"This is crazy stuff," I told Rainier ambitiously. "Look here. What if one of these 'I's got so big and powerful it shoved all the others back into the subconscious. Say an 'I' that likes to play chess. Then you'd have an obsessive compulsive psychosis."

"You're smart," said Rainier. "What about the 'I' that wants to go into space?"

Fortunately, 'I' didn't hear that.

PREMONITIONS . . . I can't tell you what they were. Some of it was Quince. But why Quince? Quince had perked up. Quince now and then joked and horse-played like the rest of us. Quince was a lot like he used to be. Of course, he did work like a dog. Eighteen hours a day. But that was because he was ambitious, because we had a deadline. So I didn't see any reason to be worried about Quince. Yet I was.

Some of it was the stuff that kept on pouring out over the networks, in the magazines, the papers. Stuff like, "Consideration of others is usually not consideration of others at all, but consideration of self. This major vice of mankind adds immeasurably to his sorrows, and puts a yoke around his neck—"

Or, "Man must sacrifice his sufferings. 'What could be easier?' you ask, when in reality, there is no pleasure man would not give up in his superstitious regard for unhappiness as the enlightenment of the soul. Children are, in fact, taught to express negative emotions by their parents and older children—"

"Calling all P.T.A.'s, that is all," I short-waved when I heard that one.

But most of these premonitions were in me. I was afraid, really afraid for the first time in my life. I had a desperate fear of something. What? 'I' wasn't in contact with that 'I,' whatever it was.

It didn't stop me. If there were ten people on that field who hated me when I started, there were a hundred when I finished. And we did finish, in three weeks flat, two days before the second package had been deadlined to go into space. We dubbed in a series of blisters around the outside of the third stage, rigged up control systems, and a whole

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new series of fire-in and fire-out and pilot tubes; and we blasted in a set of hidden stabilizers to keep our blister topside. Extra weight? There was that. So we increased the firing area on the first stage in order to get an initial, compensating power.

The plan was simple—and deliberately misleading. As the four-stager went up, towing its package, the rings, in order of one, two, three, would exhaust their fuel and be thrown off. The third ring, however, was a space-ship in itself. Quince and I would be on it.

The work on the third ring was done in the kind of secrecy you would expect to find in a clam, on a dark night, in a vacuum.

It was, however, common information that in spite of Insu we intended to take the second package up to the assembly orbit—and *try and stop us!*

I DON'T know what I did to set Rainier off. But I did. Maybe it was the office radio. Maybe I told him once too often to shut it off. And maybe I was beginning to notice that day by day, week by week, it was getting to him—that, actually, it had gotten to him from the first—and that Rainier didn't give a care whether man got into space or not.

"I'll shut it off when I get ready," said Rainier. And he tuned it a notch louder. Another broadcast, another interview with one of Insu's men. The interviewer wanted to know how come the men from the stars concluded that insult was the best technique for dispensing their critique of the human race.

The Insu man denied the use of insult, denied use of a technique, denied that the information given came under the heading of critique.

"We speak as men may one day learn to speak to one another. Those who have feelings that can be 'hurt' should determine whether those feelings are worth keeping. Those who do this have made the first step toward understanding that we are not condemning, but teaching."

"And that first step?"

"For man to realize he is not awake. This is not easy. A man may ask himself, "Am I conscious?" and a strange trick that nature plays, for a moment he will have been made *vaguely* conscious. After having reassured himself, he immediately slips back to obeying the minute, separated parts of his ego that occasionally rise.

"The men who have 'made up their minds' to go into space," the Insu man added, "are good examples. For a moment, we were able to jolt them into partial wakefulness. Then they slept again. They have ears, but they hear nothing. The proof of this is that, in spite of the facts, they still consider it man's sacred duty to conquer space before he has won out over himself."

"Turn it off, can't you, Rainey?" I snapped.

He turned it down. "Bothers you, huh? Remember you asked me if you were conscious? I said no? Naturally, if you're talking about being conscious you're a little more conscious. After that you go to sleep again."

"Me?" said I.

"You. Joe Doakes. Everybody. And you'll never get to the Moon. You're somnambulizing. You're moving too slow."

"Shut it off," I bawled, walking toward the radio with my jaw out.

"And if you want proof that you're moving too slow," said Rainier, plenty hepped up by now, "look at Cathy. After the beatings you gave her—"

I had him by the shirt front, shaking him. I pulled back my fist, but he got me in the solar plexus with a strong jab from the waist; I went down.

I looked up at him. Rainey and I, fighting. Damn Insu anyway.

Rainier's heavy face was slack with remorse. He was holding his big, red-haired fist up and looking at it.

"This," he muttered, "is the reason I have to go to school, Jig. I'm sorry. I'm quitting." He turned around and went for the hatrack.

I stayed on the floor. "Rainey," I said, fighting for breath to speak. "Look,

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kid. I need you. Don't back out on me. God knows if Quince and I will come back."

I didn't know if it'd work.

It did.

"You're hopeless," he said. "You refuse to see you don't stand a chance." He gave me a paw and yanked me up. Then he sat down behind the desk and hauled out Quince's sheets, his lips compressed.

"I've checked through Quince's figures," he said. "They look okay. Blast-off tomorrow morning, 10 A.M. Or there's an alternative curve you can use next week."

"The sooner the quicker," I snapped.

He started out of the room, shaking his head. His voice came drifting back, muttering, "—get the crew to work on it."

ALL that night I sat up, pacing and prowling. I turned the radio on. I hated television. Maybe they wouldn't be on the radio. A transcribed voice said, "When the work of intellectual center is transferred improperly to emotional center—"

I turned it off very carefully. I watched the door. A sound. Cathy coming back. No Cathy. To heck with Cathy. She'll be sorry. I might not come back. I love Cathy. Where would I be without Cathy? Cathy didn't care if she hurt me. . . .

I wanted to throw the radio out the window. Damn the radio. I slept. Quince woke me up in the morning and we took our time driving toward the field. He hummed gently, abstractedly, under his breath. It irked me.

"I had a hell of a night," I growled. Then I caught a glimpse of his left hand. It had a bloody gash on it. I gasped.

He moved his head casually to face me. His face was relaxed, peaceful, dreamy. "We had a fight," he murmured. "I hit her."

"You *what?*"

"I hit her. Then I lost my balance and knocked my hand against the corner of the stove. That's where I got the cut, not from hitting her. I didn't take time to bandage it." His head seemed to sink toward his chest. "I really wasn't a good husband," he said hopelessly.

"*Wasn't?*"

The way he said it.

But he didn't say anything more.

I was jittering when we got to the field. For a half-hour we were messed up getting into pressure-jumpers and testing. When I had the chance, I got to a 'phone and called Quince's house. No answer. So she'd gone to the market. I convinced myself she was all right.

"Jig!" yelled Rainier. "Get in there. Five minutes. Quince is loaded."

All on the q.t., you understand. I dumped myself into the cabin with Whitey and two other engineers. The door-valve screwed in. A motor whined, reducing air-pressure. Whitey held a pane of glass up, moved it around the perimeter of the valve. Last minute test for leakage. No leakage.

I took a sneak look through the port. I looked out over the field. A scattering of employees. No public. A line of deputy sheriffs way back. This was all you did to go to the Moon. Earth was moving us toward 10 A.M., aiming the ship into the curve. I let my respectful glance travel down the long tapered length of the rocket, let it move farther, two hundred yards away, to take in the package, twice as big as the ship, attached by bar-chains.

Ahead of us was the runway.

"Jig!" Quince was calling to me from the tunnel-opening over the cramped jet-controls. I scampered up the ladder and paused in the mouth of the tunnel, looking down at Whitey.

"See you!" I said. Convincing myself.

"You hope!" he said. Unconvincing me.

So I crawled down the tunnel after Quince into the topside blister of the third stage. I zippered open a can of iron grease—stuff as thick as magma—and spread it thick on the plug threads. Then Quince and I hefted it and whammed it in. We gave it all the turns it would take.

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"All set," said Quince.

We dropped cat-footed to the cabin floor, and strapped ourselves in with a half minute to go. I looked around the cabin. A compact little manual control board for fire-in, fire-out and piloting. The gyroscopes were set to trip in five minutes after throw-off. That was so Insu's men wouldn't have their attention brought to us; we wanted them to keep their attention on the mother ship and its towed package.

THE blast-off came. A rumble, a grinding, a shaking, a big whacking thwack as our chairs tilted to the direction of travel. Then most of our thoughts were left streaming behind us, not much left of us except the pure physical sensation of being.

The one thought I had had nothing to do with the situation at all. I was a kid again on the first roller coaster ride, and over and over I relived dropping down that first almost vertical slope.

And that went on until—sudden spinning motion, on an eccentric axis. We came out of it. We'd been thrown off. I leaned against my straps, reached to the wall, and forced a metal strip back on its rollers, away from a camouflaged port. And so we looked out on space. And a Moon that was making a rapid, continuous circular motion against the sky. And that's when something struck me as funny.

Quince was whimsical. "What's got into you?"

I choked, tried to gesture the idea across with my hands.

"The stars, Quince, look at them. There's too many of them!"

And it seemed that much sillier because our third-stage ring not only had a rapid, eccentric wobble, but was slowly turning over on another axis! The whole sky was out there. Ten million, billion, trillion—

"It's ridiculous," I gasped.

He smiled. "Have your fun." He frowned down at the manuals, then began tripping in corrective pilots, to take out the wobble. About that time the stabilizers threw in. The sky began to steady down—but not quite.

I was silent. I got more so. This was it.

I said unsteadily, "This is what I wanted, Quince." The ship lurched. I looked at Quince, sweating a little. He smiled pleasantly. "The five o'clock pilot seems to be choked," he said. "I'm not scared. Are you?" The lurch again. Far off, through the port, a circular shadow eclipsed a small part of the sky. It could have been our mother ship. It could have been—

"I wonder if they know we're in here after all," I said.

"Who?"

"Insu's men. Who else?"

"Oh," he said vaguely. "No, not a chance. We're a free-floating ring—they think." He nudged in a stud. I felt power gather behind us, slow, building power. We were moving, all right. Under control. I began to relax.

Another lurch. Somebody threw the Moon out of sight.

I yelled something profane. He smiled down at the board, pecking at it delicately with his fingers. That was when I got the cold chills. I swiveled, kept looking at him until he had to look at me. I told him I'd called the house and Marcia hadn't answered. "You got into a fight with her," I said. "What happened?"

"You want to know? Now?"

"Right now," I yelled.

"She's dead," he said.

Like that. I floated. A number of ideas came to me. Ideas out of hell.

"We got into a fight," he said dreamily. "I expected it would happen. Perhaps I planned it this way. I knew it wouldn't matter, though. Not as long as we were the first men on the Moon. As a matter of fact, we'll probably be the first men *all over* the Moon."

Another fierce lurch.

When we came out of it, I said distantly, "Quince. *Can you land her?*"

"Why?" he said. His lips compressed hard over his teeth, his eyes turned bitter with unconcealed hate.

And so I knew he'd picked out the best way he knew to get to me.

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I hit him with the back of my hand. Something big and walloping came from his direction and landed on my neck under the jaw. I spun. Then I grabbed both his fists at the wrists, and bent them back. I intended to break them. The ship went to hell. His face was breathing hot in mine.

"Turn her back!" I roared. "Drop her in the ocean!"

Our eyes met in the middle of that struggle. "I hate your guts," he said. "You and your planets, your stars. All I wanted was Marcia." He was crying now. He broke his wrists loose and grabbed me at the neck and started choking. My strap broke loose. I hit something. Then I hit again. The ring was going crazy in space, tossing me around like a pebble in a barrel. I saw the stars. That was the last time I saw the stars—as they should be. Clear, bright, circular, right up against your eyes.

I woke up in Insu's ship.

IT WAS Insu's ship, all right.

And of course Insu was there, sitting on his spine in a deep chair with his hands folded across his stomach. Watching me. Waiting for me to come out of it.

My first desperate thought was, I have to get conscious, I *have* to. I can't let him see me like this, groggy, half-asleep. I sat up. My shaking fingers reached for a cigarette—until I realized how mechanical that was. Then I reached slower. Still mechanical. I gave up. I smoked. I blew the smoke out furiously, looking around me for ports, for some definite sign I was still out in space. I got up, ignored Insu, stretched my legs, worked my shoulders. I was bruised, but alive. And somewhere in the world was Cathy.

Finally I sneaked another look at Insu. "Well?" I snapped.

It was disconcerting the way his eyes attached to mine. So I gave it back to him double.

His voice was soft and muted. He told me, bluntly, that if the ring hadn't started cavorting around in space I'd probably have made it to the Moon. As it was, his observers spotted it, and dragged us in.

My stomach fell out. "So I could have made it," I snarled. "I'm not so much a machine as you pretend to think."

Insu smiled, as if there were stiff wire inside his lips pulling the corners up. That was a shock. There was kindness in those eyes—kindness such as you feel in a surgeon's knife. But kindness.

"It was still quite a mechanical action," he said.

"The hell it was," I yelled. "If that was mechanical, then you're just as mechanical."

"Possibly," he said, amused.

Things were spinning. I had to sit down. "Machines trying to teach machines not to be machines," I muttered.

"No. To be better machines."

"So," I tossed off, "you're probably going to school, too."

He was silent. And my skin turned cold. "*Who?*" I asked. "Where are they? Maybe they're *not* machines. Maybe you're trying to tell me there's some holy-holy Cosmic Plan—" I rattled it off, jittering myself until the thing got so tight in me that it exploded. I leaned back, smoking and breathing too hard for relaxation.

"We're on the way down to Earth," said Insu. "I have a point that needs to be put across to you." He paused. He said abruptly, "What happened between you and Quince, Jig?"

"The darn fool was going to crash us!"

"I mean, *what happened*?"

I glared. "I told you. He hated the stuffing out of me. He killed his wife. He—"

He said patiently, "The question is, *what happened?*"

NOW it was getting me. "Maybe I should start at the beginning? Maybe I should tell you Quince and Marcia used to be in love? Then I'd have to tell you what love is. Love," I said, "is when two people like to be with each other. They get so it's miserable if they aren't. Nobody can stand to be with himself all his life." So I saw I'd put my foot in it. "And I *don't* mean people hate them-

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selves." Foot a little deeper. So I shut up and burned.

He let me burn for a while.

I cooled. "All right," I said roughly. "You've got the answer. *What happened?*"

"You and your friend Quince," he said, "fought the first human interplanetary war."

"Interplan—" I began. Then something gagged in me. I got sick. I dropped my head into my hands, and crushed against my temples to stop the roaring.

Just one little old ship on the Moon.

The sacred heritage of the human race.

Fulfillment.

Junk!

Insu's voice, from far off: "So you can see, Jig, that man must learn to know himself. It may take five hundred years. During that time, formative thinking will begin to disappear. No one will prate slogans, such as the one that has driven you. For there seems to be very little glory in man. The creations you deem most worthwhile are mad dreams of horror created in sleep. If you were, all in a moment, fully conscious of the horrors around you, you would all become insane. Fortunately, these horrors will disappear at the same rate as we are able to bring your various opposing 'I's all into conscious touch with each other."

Pause. Then he spoke again: "Our ship has landed, Jig. You can make your way to the airport not far from here. You may go home. Quince, of course, must be turned over to the authorities."

FIVE minutes later, I was unloaded, with the bisected package, on a vacant lot in the middle of Westwood, a Cincinnati suburb. I walked four blocks to a bus line. I rode the bus until I saw a taxi. The taxi took me to Lunken Airport. And so I got home.

Cathy was there when I got home? No. Sorry. My first thought wasn't about her anyway. Later I'd find her. Somehow. I dug in the cupboard and found what I wanted—a warped pocket magazine with a section called, "Have You Ever Wondered?" I went to Trig Field and found Rainier in the office.

He just kept on sitting, staring at me. I told him the story. He diddled the furry knob on top of his red skullcap.

"No doubt," I said, "you've been thinking some very big thoughts while I was gone. You're not interested in what I saw up-space?"

"Yeah," he said. "What?"

"Stars," I said. "Trillions of them. There's no perspective, so they get right into your eyes, all ten umpteenth to the ten quadrillionth of 'em."

Then I hauled out the pocket magazine. "Listen to this: In the past year, telescope observatories have discovered 350 new star clusters. Each cluster contains five to twenty galaxies. Each galaxy contains 100 billion stars maybe. That's 500,000,000,000,000,000 new stars, not counting the ones we've already got." I broke off. "Rainey, what could we do with them, even if we had them? Let's postulate we land on Moon. That only means we have to go to Mars. Then we get itching feet to hit on out for Pluto. Then we take a long hop and set up a new colony on Centaurus. Then what?"

"Easy," said Rainier. "We get homesick for Earth."

"Silly, isn't it?" I asked. "And I don't know why."

"I told you why," said Rainier, "three weeks ago. But you're bullheaded. You don't learn until it's kicked into you."

Something cold and hopeless was growing inside me. I began tearing corners off the pocket magazine.

"You're a wreck," said Rainier, studying me. "Maybe you need a vacation."

"It isn't a vacation I need," I said hoarsely. "I know why I'm a wreck, Rainey. It's because I know Insu is right. All I wanted to do was get up to the Moon. Instead, I fought a space war. But I haven't really learned anything, Rainey. Hardly anything. It's going to take me a half a lifetime to *really* learn."

I felt that old, strong 'I' beginning to come up and pound the hell out of me.

"Rainey," I said, "somehow—I don't know how—and I'm not sure why—but I *have* to get to the Moon." ° ° °

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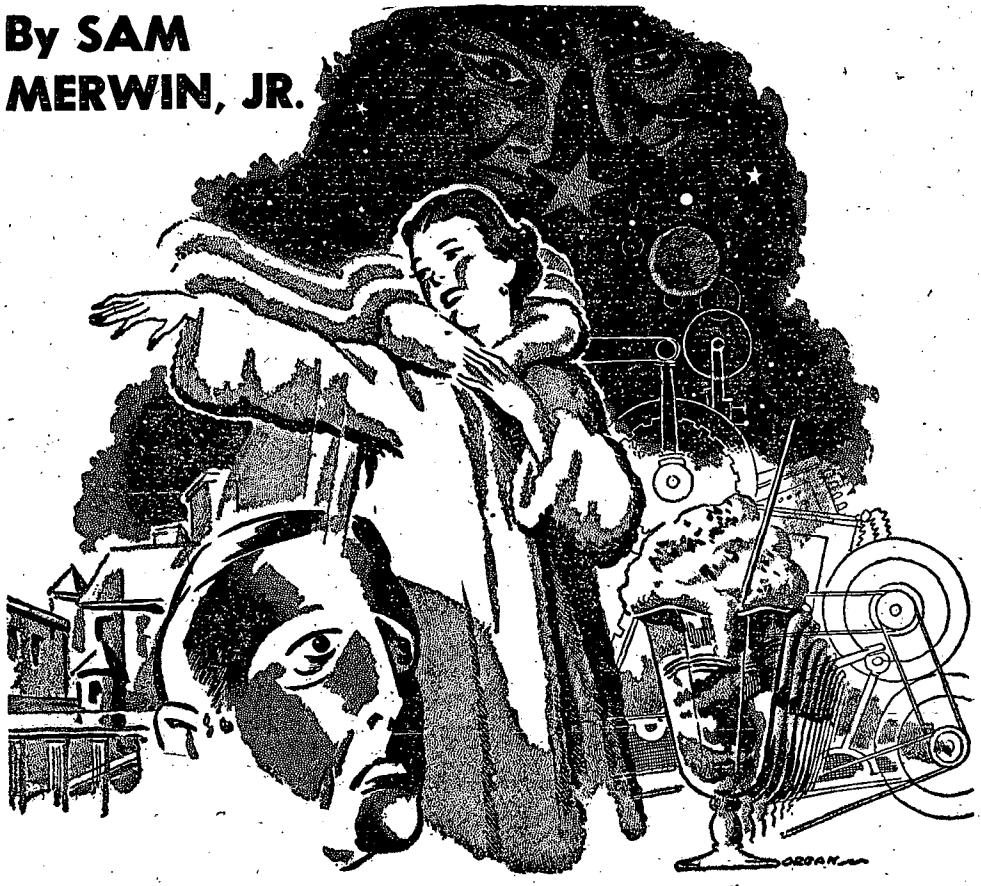
By SAM MERWIN, JR.



DISTORTION PATTERN

She was only the boss's secretary, but she was sitting in the lap of the gods. . . .

THEY met just beyond the erratic orbit of Pluto, where the warm rays of the Sun are reduced by distance to the mere chill twinkle of another star. But the fearsome cold of deep space meant no more to them than the heat of the photosphere itself—for they were to men as men are to the lowliest cephelapod.

They needed no armored atomically-powered vessels to travel from planet to planet, from star to star—for they were free to roam the spaceways at will. Nor did they need to plumb the murky grey-

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ness of sub-space to travel faster than light.

Yet they were not gods, though they were possessed of powers surpassing the powers of the legendary gods of Earth. And because they were not gods they were capable, on occasion, of error.

Their rendezvous beyond Pluto was such an occasion.

Herlin—for such was his name though actually he had neither name nor sex—floated outward from Earth, relaxed and invisible, at a slow rate of about one hundred thousand miles per second, until he sensed the nearness of Pleuvet, awaiting him.

Said Pleuvet, although she didn't really speak, "You are late, Herlin. We have many parsecs to travel before the next sidereal swing of the Milky Way. Why must you always be so curious?"

"It is my nature and I cannot change," replied Herlin, his somber mood affecting that of his cosmic mate.

"I suppose not," said Pleuvet. "Well, did you enjoy your trip to the Third Planet? What's it like?"

"A nice place to visit, but I'd hate to stay there," was the reply. "The dominant species is still bound to its bodies."

"How vulgar!" came the reply. "Will they *never* learn?"

"They are learning with amazing speed," said Herlin. "Yet I am frightened, for they seem bent on achieving self-destruction. They have begun to master the atom, yet they use it only for weapons."

"They're not really a very important planet," Pleuvet put in.

"Don't be a snob," replied Herlin. "To them they are important. And they're such lively creatures."

Pleuvet sighed, said, "I know what this means—you're going to do something to help them. At times I think it is you who will never learn. Remember the last time you tried—with those chitinous creatures who lived near the great star in Andromeda?"

"How did I know they'd go nova?" retorted Herlin crossly. "Besides, this is totally different. If I could give just one of them some keys to a few easy material comforts it might relieve the pressures that are driving all of them toward self-ruin."

"I'll lay odds you're thinking of a female creature," said Pleuvet with a trace of acid. "Well, if you're going to do something I can't stop you—but for the sake of the galaxy, do it quickly. We can't loll around out here forever!"

"There are problems," mused Herlin seriously. "First there is the matter of reaching the right brain—one that is not too clogged with their limited lines of thought, yet has sufficient ability at least to put suggestions in articulate form. Then there is the problem of ensuring that our suggestions reach an authority sufficiently powerful to see they are put to use."

Pleuvet said peevishly, "I wish you wouldn't say *our* suggestions. These are all yours. I want nothing to do with them. What are they?"

With the tact of a veteran mate Herlin discreetly hid his amusement at the similarity amongst female creatures in all levels of the universe. He said, "They need more food, more clothing, greater shelter. . . ."

"Just like a male," said Pleuvet, showing more interest in the problem. "Always thinking of material comforts. I think I shall add a little gift of my own. . . ."

JEANNETTE COREY was parked with Bill Tanner in his 1947 topless convertible in the starlit semi-seclusion of the Elite Drive-in Theater outside of Gordon City when the gifts of the non-gods descended upon her. At the moment they reached her Jeannette was in the act of imprinting the somewhat gooey pattern of her lips upon Bill's.

She jumped without warning in the circle of his arms, causing Bill to bang a knee on the steering shaft, cried, "Bill Tanner, what are you trying to do?"

"Are you kidding, honey?" asked Bill, who was possessed of a remarkably pragmatic single-purpose where women were concerned.

Puzzled, Jeannette paused and frowned as she put her mental processes into

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gear. She noted that Bill's hands were in no more than the usual places, wondered what he could have done. Then, because after the first moment of involuntary panic had passed, the sensation was not unpleasant, she murmured, "Do it again."

"A pleasure, honey," said Bill gathering her close.

But a moment later Jeannette wriggled free, regarded him with reproach, said, "That isn't it, Bill!"

"What isn't what?" countered Bill, himself bewildered. He was, with considerable reason, sure of his amatory technique.

"You know!" said Jeannette accusingly.

"Baby," replied Bill resentfully, "you must be off your rocker."

They were sitting well apart from each other when he drove her home—half an hour before the unwatched movie dragged to its close. And in the act of unfastening her garterbelt before going to bed Jeannette paused and frowned again, murmured, "Well, it was certainly funny!" Deciding she'd have to make it up to Bill or lose him permanently to Eileen, she shrugged the whole business off and, getting under the covers, turned out the light.

Jeannette forgot about it the next morning, in the course of her duties as personal secretary to Harvey MacRae, President and Chairman of the Board of the MacRae Corporation, Gordon City's small but important single manufacturing concern, unless you included the ramshackle hair-restorer plant down by the river.

She had some notes on a new air-filter process to transcribe as well as the usual number of telephone calls to make and appointments to arrange for Mr. MacRae, who was due in from Washington on the three o'clock plane that afternoon.

Not until she settled down at twelve-thirty for lunch at her regular Rose Tea Shoppe table with Eileen Dee did she sense that her problems were greater than usual. Eileen—a plump, vapidly pretty blonde of twenty-two—was Jeannette's closest girl-friend—and her most hated rival.

Jeannette's machine-like competence at filing cabinet, typewriter and mimeograph machine had enabled her to win out over Eileen as Harvey MacRae's personal secretary—with a salary edge of ten big dollars a week—but her promotion from the secretarial pool had given Eileen the inner daytime track with Bill Tanner, who was foreman of the shipping department. Bill seldom if ever got into the chief's office but he was always in and out of the main office, what with orders and receipts to pick up or deliver.

A certain smugness about the corners of Eileen's lipsticked mouth as she picked up the single-card menu, a certain lack of emotion in her groans about her figure as she selected the usual hated carrot salad, told Jeannette the worst had happened.

She moved to the attack while they waited for Mamie the waitress to take their orders. With elaborate casualness she said, "Where are you and Bill going tonight?"

Eileen was so startled she all but dropped the menu. Blue eyes wide she said, "Why—how'd you know we had a date tonight?"

IN HER best offhand manner Jeannette tittered and said, "You don't think Bill would date you without asking my permission, do you, Eileen?"

Eileen's mouth opened and closed like a trout's while flooding questions and quips blocked each other in their hurry to pass the carefully chlorophylled barrier of her teeth. And before she could speak Mamie came up and with calculated effect Jeannette said, "Miss Dee is having the usual. But bring me the potted meat balls, the hot rolls and—and a morning glory for dessert."

"Okay," said Mamie, eying Jeannette suspiciously. Then, as she departed for the kitchen, she mimicked, "Miss Dee is having the usual. . . ." in an affected pseudo-soprano.

"Mamie's getting too fresh," said Jeannette, then shrugged it off. She

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could enjoy jealousy as long as someone else was feeling it toward her.

"You're not really gonna eat all that, Jeannette?" asked Eileen in thin incredulous tones. "You'll be fat as a panda."

"I lost two pounds last week," said Jeannette, studying the enamel on her fingernails. "The *Film Chatter Glamour Monthly* warns us about losing weight. Gloria Whitby nearly died from taking off twenty pounds too fast last year, it says."

Jeannette was one of the fortunate few who could eat like a horse and never show it. She went along with Eileen's enforced vegetarianism more because the rest of the girls ate that way at lunch than because she liked dieting. She had a good figure and she knew it well—hadn't Bill and the rest of the boys been telling her about it for years?

Thinking of Bill, and his prompt desertion to Eileen after the spat in the drive-in, Jeannette's lips thinned ever so slightly and she was glad—*glad!*—she had ordered what she did. She ate every bit of the potted meatballs, relishing the last morsel of the potatoes and devoured her morning glory lingeringly.

There was a dish, she thought—a huge goblet filled with five scoops of various ice creams and sherbets, seven sauces, whipped cream and nuts—and topped with chocolate chips and whipped cream!

It was, she decided after covert glances at Eileen's expression of drooling anguish, the finest eating in the world. As for Bill Tanner—let him have his date with Eileen. He'd appreciate *her* favors all the more by comparison and come crawling back tomorrow.

So, instead of worrying about Eileen and Bill while she worked that afternoon, Jeannette let her thoughts rove instead to morning glories—to a huge goblet packed with scoops of strawberry, peach and pistachio ice cream, with lime and raspberry sherbets, awash with a pousse café blend of crushed peaches, crushed pineapple, crushed strawberries, thick fudge, chopped cherries and marshmallow, the whole crowned massively with swirls of whipped cream, chopped pecans and shaving-like chocolate chips!

Jeannette actually felt a certain smugness at her good fortune in being able to enjoy this ambrosial delight without—unlike certain other young women of her acquaintance—having to worry about popping her girdle afterward—or any girdle at all for that matter. It was plenty to keep her mind occupied while she toiled at her typewriter.

For, seated behind her desk, Jeannette was a sort of flesh-and-blood robot. She could transcribe or even stencil with absolute accuracy, at the same time letting her thoughts and reverie flow freely wherever they wished. Thanks to this double absorption she had acquired a reputation for fantastic concentration. In a way her bosses were right.

WHEN, at four-thirty, Mr. MacRae, having disposed of his appointments, called on her for the air-filter transcript, Jeannette handed it over with serene confidence and went to the ladies' room, there to repair the afternoon's ravages in her makeup and patronize amiably such other ladies of the stenographic ensemble who chose the same time to visit what was known locally and quasi-affectionately as the "clubroom."

She was engaged in serious discussion of Gloria Whitby's latest fashion shots in a new-minted Hollywood fan magazine when Eileen Dee entered, her tiny much-mascaraed blue eyes alight with malice. Eileen said, "Jeannette, Mr. MacRae—" but Jeannette ignored her.

She concluded her speech about Gloria Whitby with, "So she's wearing a new platina mink stole! So what? Mink is for football." Having delivered this devastating riposte, she turned haughtily to her friend, lifted a newly-penciled left eyebrow and said patiently, "Yes, Eileen, what is it?"

"Mr. MacRae wants you in his office—at once," was the unexpected reply. "He's having six kinds of fit."

"Thank you, Eileen—I'll attend to Mr. MacRae in due time," said Jeannette, stifling a vague disquiet beneath the veteran assurance of her stenographic perfection. While the other girls gasped and giggled, she redrew her mouth deliber-

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ately, patted a dark curl into place above her right ear and walked haughtily out of the clubroom, giving her colleagues a flip salute of farewell.

Mr. MacRae was youngish, even handsome, though the hair above his ears was beginning to acquire a permanent dandruff hue. When not engaged too deeply in thoughts of Gloria Whitby, Bill Tanner, Eileen, the latest dress in the Bon-Ton window or morning glories, Jeannette had occasionally considered Harvey MacRae as a man instead of an employer.

He'd look good with a highball glass in his hand, sitting in the middle of one of those four-color whisky ads, she had long ago decided. But she couldn't imagine his arms around her in a topless convertible, sharing the intimacies that went with a visit to the Elite Drive-in. He was more the Gloria Whitby type, the kind who slipped headwaiters ten-dollar bills and dined at restaurants where snails and quails were offered instead of meatballs and morning glories. To Jeannette, Mr. MacRae belonged in a revered and slightly uncomfortable world she had neither desire for nor hope of attaining.

He didn't greet her with his usual quarter-smile—not this time. Something in the depth of his grey eyes as he regarded her almost gave her goose-flesh. He said, "Sorry to interrupt you at tea-time, Miss Corey, but I want you to read this over and tell me what it is. Sit down."

He lit a cigarette and handed Jeannette the report she had spent the afternoon typing. At least it was typed on her machine and bore the heading of the air-filter transcript. But from the first sentence on it read to her like double-talk. She frowned, trying vainly to make sense of it, flipped through it quickly with a growing sense of panic. Finally she looked up at Mr. MacRae, bewildered.

He spoke through the pipe he was relighting, "Well, Miss Corey, what is it? It certainly isn't the air-filter report I wanted."

"I don't—it must be some kind of a joke," said Jeannette desperately, thinking at once of Eileen.

"A strange sort of joke, don't you think, Miss Corey?" From the way he looked at her she couldn't tell if he were mad or not.

She got up desperately, said, "I'll get my pad and check." Then from the doorway, "Gee, Mr. MacRae, I wouldn't do a thing like that on purpose."

"I'm sure of that," was the crisp reply.

JEANNETTE got her pad and read the shorthand notes back to him aloud. Her own bewilderment increased, as did her employer's. For there was no question about it—these were the air-filter notes. When he lifted a hand to stop her reading she blurted, "Golly, Mr. MacRae, I don't understand it. Somebody must of switched them."

"I don't understand it myself," said Mr. MacRae, leaning back in his Windsor chair and eying the porous sound-proofed ceiling. "It probably hasn't occurred to you, Jeannette, but most of the world is suffering from malnutrition."

"No, Mr. MacRae," said Jeannette, baffled but reassured by his use of her given name. "It hasn't."

"I didn't think it had," he told her, "and this makes your—paper—here the more astounding. For unless my entire training and career are wrong you have just written what looks like a completely workable theory for producing edible food out of water.

"Experts have been working with yeast growths and ocean plankton for decades in an effort to supplement the world's inadequate food supply—and have failed to come up with anything fit for human consumption."

He paused, straightened up, looked directly at her, said, "And now you have come up with something neither Einstein nor Fermi has even thought of."

"You mean Joe Fermi down at the dairy?" Jeannette asked.

Mr. MacRae's head flew back as if Rocky Marciano had landed one of his famed right-hand punches squarely on the point of his jaw. He ran a hand through his greying hair, opened his

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mouth, closed it, opened it again and said, "Jeannette, don't be afraid—I want to know where this came from." He laid a hand flat on the mysterious report.

"Gee whiz, Mr. MacRae," said Jeannette desperately. "How should I know? I was just typing this afternoon like I always do. Maybe I was thinking a little about the morning glory I had for dessert at the Rose Tea Shoppe this noon."

"What's a morning glory, Jeannette?" he asked gently.

Jeannette told him. He looked slightly green as she concluded her recitation of its contents. But he stopped questioning her, saying instead, "Jeannette, I want to keep this entire business a secret just between you and me for the time being—until we see how it works out."

Jeannette might be out of her depth, but she had no intention of drowning. She said, "Mr. MacRae, I been thinking maybe you ought to give me a raise."

There was incredulity in his grey eyes as he stared at her. Finally he shook his head and Jeannette prepared a second assault. But he said, "All right, Jeannette—five more a week."

"Ten," said Jeannette promptly.

"All right—ten," he told her and, when she left, she wondered why she hadn't asked for fifteen.

Jeannette didn't enjoy the raise much—because she was vowed to secrecy on threat of losing it. And what, she wondered, was the use of getting a break if she couldn't bask just a little in the envy of her colleagues, especially Eileen.

IN A WAY she didn't blame Eileen for making time with Bill Tanner while she had the opportunity. But there were some things, she told herself resentfully, that a nice girl just didn't do merely to take a man away from her girlfriend—not even a Bill Tanner.

That things had evidently happened as a result of the date and a succession of dates that followed was all too evident to Jeannette. She could see it in Bill's casual refusal to ask her out with him again, in Eileen's smugness at lunch and in the clubroom. Jeannette went out with a couple of the company salesmen, but they were older and fatter and, she told herself, crude.

Meanwhile the tests of Jeannette's mysterious script were being conducted in the utmost secrecy, under supervision of Mr. MacRae himself. He had canceled all his other interests to oversee them and tried once or twice to explain to Jeannette what was happening; abortively—for Jeannette's mind was full of more important things.

Especially the day Eileen appeared at lunch wearing Bill Tanner's high school gold football on a chain around her plump neck. It was the first nippy day of fall and not even leisurely indulgence in another morning glory for dessert offered Jeannette compensation.

That afternoon she indulged in some heavier-than-usual reverie work while typing a routine fertilizer report. Her first instinct to move in like a Tiger tank and reclaim Bill Tanner had been replaced by a desire to move onward and upward in the world, leaving both Bill and Eileen far behind her in the wallowing ruck of regretful little people. She was going to *be* somebody and let them both know it.

She shivered a little as the caloric heat engendered by the morning glory wore off and considered what would be her first mark of achievement. She was going to have to do or get something spectacular. A mink coat was out—after her crack about mink being for football. Besides, even with her raise, her bank account was a long way from mink outlays, even on time.

She thought of the latest four-color fan-magazine picture of Gloria Whitby, dressed in a coat of fabulous chinchilla for an evening outing at the Mocambo in Hollywood. There, Jeannette thought, was a coat—a dramatically flared luxurious wrap-around whose costly softness projected itself through the very picture. If she couldn't afford a mink she could afford a chinchilla even less—so she thought and proceeded to dream about the more fabulous garment. After all, there wasn't even a federal tax on daydreams—as yet.

That was the second time. Again, when

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she had finished, Mr. MacRae summoned her to his office and made her read what she had typed. Again, as with the air-filter transcript, she had apparently come up with a miraculously workable process for clothing the peoples of the world by transmutation of the most common elements.

"It's like spirit writing!" enthused Mr. MacRae. "I'd think it some sort of hoax if we hadn't already progressed with the tests of your first process to a point where we know it is workable. Think of it! Virtually free food and clothing for the entire world!"

"Mr. MacRae," said Jeannette.

He eyed her warily, said, "How much this time?"

"Only ten more," she replied. Then, jamming her pad into her lap so that her knees wouldn't knock together, "I wanna be an executive—and. . . ."

"What kind of an executive?" asked her employer, again passing a well-manicured hand through his previously well-combed hair.

"Any kind," said Jeannette promptly. "Just so I'm an executive around here." Then, leaning forward and dropping her voice to demi-confidential level, "I wanna be somebody, Mr. MacRae."

He looked at her and his lips twitched and she knew she had won. Let him laugh at her, she thought—she'd take care of that later on. Himself too, she decided. Finally he said, "I guess maybe you rate it after what you've done—though don't ask me how you've done it. From here on you're assistant to the personnel manager."

"Does that make me an executive?" she asked him bluntly.

"It does," he said, rising and bowing to her.

She said, "Mr. MacRae, you're cute!" And, as another idea struck her, "I want you should take me to the company dance next Saturday. After all, it isn't as if I were just your secretary any more."

He gulped and staggered, but was game. And that was how Jeannette became a junior executive and took Harvey MacRae to the dance with her. If it was vice versa on the latter, it didn't show. For the night was a triple triumph for Jeannette.

Her first big moment came when Eileen, wearing last year's brown spangled evening dress, caught sight of her in her new strapless plunging-neckline pink-satin-and-rhinestone dress with the white fur trim—entering on the arm of the boss.

Eileen's eyes were normally small—but at this spectacle they resembled twin blue moons. As she glided away to the music in Harvey MacRae's expert grasp she felt something of a benefactor for enlarging Eileen's least attractive feature, if only momentarily.

Jeannette's second big moment arrived when Bill Tanner cut in on her. He held her so carefully that she said finally, "What's eating you, Bill—afraid I'll break?"

"Gotta handle the boss's gal pal with kid gloves," he replied acidly.

"That's right," she said, "I could have you fired."

It was heady wine to feel the belligerence go out of him.

The third moment arrived later, when Harvey MacRae took her home. He made no pass at her until he pulled his Cadillac to a halt in front of the side street house where Jeannette roomed. Then he looked at her, almost as if he were surveying a cut of meat in a butcher shop, and said, "Jeannette, you're the most remarkable girl I've ever known."

"Show me," Jeannette said promptly. After all, it had been a party and what was a party without a little romance?

"Show you what?" he countered, puzzled.

"Gee whiz!" she exploded. "I thought you were a smart man, Mr. MacRae. Do I have to draw you a picture?"

"Oh!" he gulped; his arms went around her and his lips reached somewhat reluctantly for hers.

IT WAS a long-held theory of Jeannette's that if you were going to be kissed you might as well do a job of it, so she put her back into it. After a moment in which she seemed to rouse no response in her employer, Mr. MacRae

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came to life with an expertness and suave savagery that both surprised and delighted her. She thought briefly of Bill Tanner, and how she had let a boy do a man's job—for Mr. MacRae was a man after all, and no doubt about it.

She almost had to fight her way out of the car. Then, when she was free, she drew herself up haughtily and said, "Mr. MacRae, you mustn't let yourself get carried away like that unless you mean it."

He stared at her through the moon-swept darkness, apparently in sheer disbelief. Then he said, "It must have been the poet in me—roused by the sweet rhythms of your precious prose."

She said, "Golly, Mr. MacRae—you *are* kinda cute!"

He said, "Good night, Miss Corey. It's been a most unusual evening." Then he drove away, leaving her with something new to think about. Mr. MacRae as a boy-friend? It hadn't occurred to her before. But he *was* distinguished-looking, and his response to her lovemaking had been a pleasant surprise. Maybe if he dyed his greying hair black—no, she decided, better leave it alone. Too many people knew about it. Besides, it was part of his man-of-distinction look.

She didn't see him the next day, which was Sunday, and on Monday he took off on a trip to New York and Washington. She wondered if he'd gone to avoid her—and decided it might be a good sign if he had. After all, if she got Mr. MacRae to marry her, she really *would* be somebody. A lot more than just an executive. Vistas of country club porches and lawn parties opened up before her.

These vistas closed with a jolt on Thursday, with Mr. MacRae due back that afternoon, when Eileen flashed a quarter-carat diamond engagement ring at the Rose Tea Shoppe. She burbled, "Isn't it simply heavenly, Jeannette? And that's not the half of it! Bill's already made a down payment on one of those cute little houses in the Long Meadows development. We're gonna move in in two weeks, right after we're married."

"You're doing it in kind of a hurry, aren't you?" said Jeannette unkindly, drawing a titter from one or two of the girls clustered around the table.

Eileen turned beet red and her little blue eyes sparked. Then she said, "You've been sour grapesing Bill and me all along. But it won't get you anywhere now. So why don't you shut up?"

Jeannette felt liquid rage spurt through her veins. She barely suppressed an impulse to tell Eileen she could have both Bill and herself fired just by lifting her little finger. But that, she decided would be stupid. Let them have their little jobs and stay in them and rot. She drew herself together with dignity and said, "I'm sure I wish you and Bill every happiness in the world." Then, chin up, she stalked from the suddenly silent Tea Shoppe.

She kept thinking, back at her desk—right under my back, right behind my nose, those two sneaking around and getting engaged. It took her all of twenty minutes to remind herself she no longer wanted so vulgar a character as Bill Tanner. Let Eileen have him!

But the little house hurt. Jeannette, an orphan, had long ago been fed to the teeth with living in rooms, perforce obeying restrictions enforced by narrow-minded and gossipy old landladies, eating dinner with drab people at boarding house tables. But what else was a single girl to do in Gordon City if she wanted to stay respectable?

She reminded herself she was an executive, drawing an important salary, maybe going to marry Mr. MacRae. He had returned that afternoon, and she cast a speculative look in the direction of his office. Someday soon she was going to have a dream house of her own—and it wasn't going to be any four-room-and-bath mass-produced job in any Long Meadows development, either.

Though she now had her own secretary and no longer had to type a line, Jeannette in her frustration simply coudn't sit behind her desk and wait for someone to need her services. She got hold of some typing and went to work, seeking release in familiar action.

And as she typed she considered the sort of dream house she was going to build. And involuntarily an image rose

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in her mind—of a long ornate black-and-white stone structure with mission- type turrets and towers sticking out of the roof here and there and lots of balconies and outside stairways. It was the image of Gloria Whitby's new mansion, high on a hilltop in Beverly Hills.

AS IN the movie star's house, each room would be different—like a museum or a palace. There would be a modernistic room, an antique room, a Louis Fifteenth-type room with lots of gilt furniture, a huge bedroom with ermine walls and a blue-glass ceiling and a bed as big and soft as a football field after a spring rain. In the basement rumpus room would be a reproduction, full-size, of the Stork Club bar and the bathrooms would turn Cecil B. DeMille green with envy. Oh, it was going to be quite a house.

When she came out of it she glanced at what she had typed and her eyes widened. She gathered up the papers, saw that it was after four, hurried to Mr. MacRae's office and planted them on that bewildered manufacturer's desk. She said, "Look, Mr. MacRae, I've gone and done it again! What's it mean?"

He said, "Oh no! Not again!" and shied away from her in his chair. Then his eyes took her in and he signed and said, "I guess it's my duty—and I might as well tell you they're all heated up about your inventions in Washington, Jeannette."

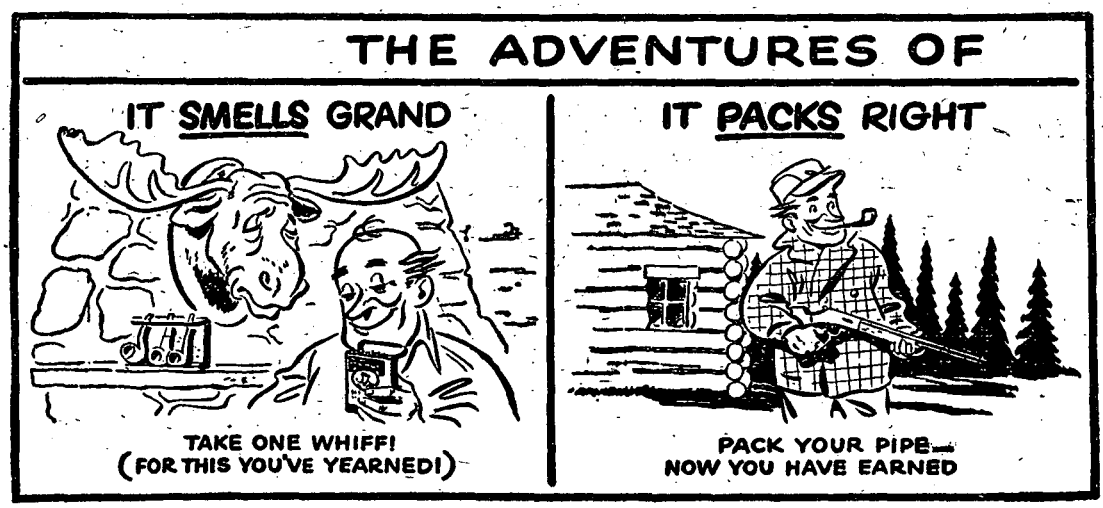
"That's nice, Harvey," she said demurely, using his first-name for the first time.

He looked at her quickly with something-like panic, then doggedly began to read what she had typed. Once or twice he grunted and, when he had finished, he shook his head slowly. Jeannette, watching his reactions, peered through a cloud of her own cigarette smoke and said, "No good, huh?"

"It's incredible!" he replied, rising and pacing the carpet in back of his desk, kicking a leg of his Windsor chair each time he passed it. "It looks very much as if you've solved two of the basic human needs already—those for food and clothing. Now you seem to have come up with a solution to the world housing problem."

"You mean I just typed an atomic house or something?" she asked incredulously.

He shook his head again, looked at her with something between awe and pity. "Something like that," he told her. "I still can't believe it." Then, becoming brisk, "The amazing part of all these inventions of yours is their simplicity.



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We'll have the first two ready for actual tests in a week—and with what we've learned from them we ought to have this one ready too."

"That'll be nice," said Jeannette. "Mr. Mac—Harvey. . . ."

He swung toward her as if a bullet had spun him around. He said, "Yes, Miss Co—Jeannette. What is it this time?"

"You," she told him simply.

He sat down again—hard. He said, "This is crazy. What makes you think I go along with our deal?"

"I don't think it's crazy," she told him. "You're a very cute older man and I go for you. After all, I've done a lot for you, Harvey—don't you think you could do something for me?" She thrust out her lower lip slightly in a pout that had never failed to work before.

It failed this time. Mr. MacRae ran a hand through his hair and rested his forearms on the desktop and said, "But I'm not in love with *you*, Jeannette. I hardly know you."

Studying her fingernails Jeannette said, "That can come later. After all married people can't stay strangers very long."

"You've got a point there," conceded Mr. MacRae, mustering a smile from somewhere back of his twitching ears. "But this is awfully sudden—I'm afraid I need time to think about it."

"Not too much time," said Jeannette ominously.

He flung himself back in his chair, replied, "Listen, Jeannette, I'm going to be awfully busy getting these tests ready. I won't have much time for you or anyone till they're complete."

"All right," she said contentedly, "till after the tests." As she left she thought —at least he didn't kick me out, the big, stuck-up snob! But she wanted him more than ever for putting her off. She solaced herself further by eating a morning glory all by herself in the Tea Shoppe before the other girls got through their work day.

THE tests were held in a huge abandoned World War Two factory Mr. MacRae had purchased on the edge of Gordon City. Because they were so tentative, outside of a quartet of laboratory technicians, Mr. MacRae and Jeannette, there was only a quartet of other witnesses—divided evenly between high science and high brass.

When Jeannette saw the strange modernistic-looking devices on the concrete floor of the otherwise empty edifice she hugged Mr. MacRae's arm and cried, "Ooh! Are those the things they made from what I wrote? They're *cute!*"

[*Turn page*]

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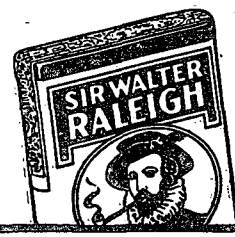
IT CAN'T BITE!

SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE, AND SIR WALTER RALEIGH NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF.



It costs no more to get the best!

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Mr. MacRae shuddered slightly and rolled his eyes at the eminent quartet of visitors. Then he said quickly, "Let's get going, men."

"Try number one—the food machine," said an underling and someone pressed a button that started one of the weird machines operating. There was a sudden whir of metallic parts moving much too fast for the eye to follow. Then, on a table-like platform beneath a vent in the first machine, appeared a tall goblet filled with foods of many colors and topped with an impressive array of whipped cream and chocolate chips. There was a murmur of something like consternation. But Jeannette cried, "Look! A morning glory! Better than the ones at the Tea Shoppe! And there's another—and another!"

"Turn it off," said Mr. MacRae curtly. Then, to Jeannette, "Is this one of those—contraptions you described?"

Jeannette, already eating the first morning glory, nodded happily, thinking what a wonderful machine it was. But Mr. MacRae seemed to feel differently. He said anxiously, "Can't it produce anything else?"

They tried and they tried—but it couldn't. There was much muttering among the visitors as to the ability of the human race to survive on a diet exclusively of morning glories. The ultimate verdict was that, while the machine might be a miracle, its use would be limited to drugstores, army camps and the like.

"Try number two," said Mr. MacRae.

This was a more elaborate machine but it moved in similar whirring silence. And from its vent dropped a perfect chinchilla coat, an exact duplicate of Gloria Whitby's, then another—and another. By the time Mr. MacRea had ordered it turned off Jeannette was hugging all three of the coats to her, reveling in their soft warmth.

Mr. MacRae was grimmer than ever when he ordered number three put on trial. This was the largest most imposing of all the instruments. It seemed to make ghost drawings in the air—and when it was through Gloria Whitby's new Beverly Hills mansion, black-and-white turreted-and-balconied exterior crowded the plant from sidewall to sidewall. Gloria gave a little squeal and raced inside. All the different rooms were there, exactly as she had seen them in the shots-at-home feature in *Film Glamour Magazine*.

The others followed her in more slowly. They were not long in reaching a decision. It was, according to their spokesman, a lieutenant general with an iron-grey mustache, "These machines are incredible, MacRae, but in their present stage of development we fear they might do more harm than good if offered for general use. Keep in touch with us."

Jeannette, carrying a morning glory and wearing one of her three chinchilla coats, had not listened. She was satisfied, especially when she found a groggy Harvey MacRae sitting distraught upon the wide rim of an octagonal green porphyry bath-tub. She said, "Isn't it wonderful? We've got everything I ever dreamed of."

He looked at her, his eyes narrowing, beginning to realize the truth. And then he realized something else, something that scared him even more deeply than Jeannette's mysterious machines. Though he knew her to be a grasping, shallow, selfish, undeveloped little tart, hiding behind a shopgirl garterbelt of respectability, she was alluring and richly beautiful to his eyes. As she smiled at him his blood began to pound against his temples, his hands began to shake with desire.

And when he said, as he knew with dreadful inevitability she was about to say, "Don't let it upset you, Harvey—you've got me too," he replied, as he had known he would, "Thanks, darling, I knew you'd stand by me." And his arm, unrequested, crept up around her $49.50-at-the-Bon Ton waist.

* * * * *

Somewhere, halfway across the Galaxy, an invisible Herlin said without words to his invisible mate, "What are you looking so happy about?"

And Pleuvet replied, also without words, "Oh, nothing, I was just thinking of a fourth gift."

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Was the professor a prophet or a demon?

Under the savage sun he looked like a prophet in some dreadful valley

CLOCKWORK

BY LESLIE BIGELOW

OF COURSE everybody remembers last June. For June, 1955, is a central date in the human tale; a date, in fact, like December 2, 1942, when before physicists whose eyes widened with glee, then narrowed with surmise, the uranium pile chain-reacted beneath Stagg Stadium at Chicago.

At 11:33 p. m. Greenwich time, June 22, 1955, the first earth rocket gained the moon, furrowing Tycho Brahe's crater. Because that rocket carried instruments (including several extremely quaint ones, smuggled onto the rocket) the moon was scrutinized by telescope, canvassed by radar, and of course inspected by a brigade of amateurs on every housetop.

Therefore, on the night of June 24 perhaps several hundred thousand of us witnessed an effect contradictorily de-

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scribed and unconvincingly explained. At 12:22 the moon shimmered to a gossamer disc, almost as though it were our moon no longer, but instead an imminent moon; a moon about to be born; a moon wanly peering through a hole where the moon had been. Because it resumed its normal aspect within five minutes, the astronomers could not check certain disturbing computations of weight. But the Mount Palomar spokesman said, "I tell you, the moon had *negative* density."

On the night of June 26, the moon bulged like a toy balloon, as though puffed out by some interstellar prankster, then at once shrank back to normal.

By now, of course, our playful satellite had extorted headlines of a size reserved for the Last Judgment, while our backyards pulsed with embryo Keplers, so that the phenomenon of June 30 was witnessed by half the world. On that night, after blurring for an instant, at 1:16 the moon lost all familiar landmarks. Gone the dead sea hollows; gone the cindery mountains and the drifted ash; gone, all gone.

The *Chicago Tribune* declared: Other Side of Moon Visible at Last. And the comment was as sound as any of the *Tribune's*. The properties of the moon were unchanged. But this moon, this literally new moon, was smooth. The Man in the Moon had gone somewhere a-journeying. And so far as we know now, he has gone for good.

Well! My friend Griffenhoek likes to insist that history is at best a thin gruel: forlorn nubbins of fact blobbing in a sea of conjecture. Suppose we set another nubbing afloat in that conjectural sea. For what really happened during that June of 1955 can be related. But let us implore our diverse gods that only Griffinhoek may ever explain precisely how it happened!

IT WAS one of our friendly sessions of disdain and insult: Noah Griffenhoek, professor of physics, and myself, Patrick Lanson, professor of English—a strange alliance, surely. "Mathematics!" I snorted, resuming our noisy quarrel. "Systematic jabberwocky!"

Griffenhoek smiled at me over the chess table in his office, where we sneak games between classes at the university. I like to tease him to his noble roaring, so, "Mathematics! Why, take any group of objects and certainly you can weave a tissue of numbers around them. Some web of relationship. So far that's all you prancing mathematicians have ever done with the world. But then you erroneously argue that those numbers of yours correspond with reality. Correspond with reality! Fantods and tarradiddles!"

But Griffenhoek merely smiled.

"Very well," I said. "Consider the number 1 or the number 7. Just *why* they correspond with reality, only Pythagoras could say. But they do—somewhat. At least, you can have two wives or seven houris. But what about negative numbers? Oh," I went on with what I hoped was maddening condescension, "Oh, I suppose negative numbers are 'real' too. A negative 7 might be seven houris you can't get."

Good! His fingers pattered; his neck distended. So I proceeded, "But now I have you, Griff. What about imaginary numbers? What do *they* correspond to? What about the square root of minus one? What does *that* match in the real world?"

With an effort, Griffenhoek still smiled.

"Charlatan!" I sneered. "Impostor! Show me what a surd corresponds to in the real world and I'll believe you. But until you do that, your mathematics is the kindergarten trifling of deluded theorists. It's—"

At last! Griffenhoek shoved the board from beneath the chessmen. He demanded, "You will be at home this afternoon, I trust?"

"Certainly. Even to a mathematician!"

In a carefully controlled voice he said, "This afternoon, then. But you will not like it." Then he launched his ultimate insult. "No, *professor of English,* you will not like it at all."

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PROFESSIONAL skill aside, Griffenhoek is that capital fellow, the old time master craftsman, cranky and exacting: the sort of man who peers at you over steel-rimmed spectacles in a job print shop; or mends watches in a small southern town and invents his own escapements; or like Cerberus guards the precision toolroom in a machine shop. Usually a Debs socialist, an agnostic, a bachelor, argumentative and whiskered. The species, alas, nears extinction, along with great stylists, imperial philosophers, and honest men.

Another tiresome eccentric? Well, God bless eccentrics, for it is the eccentric, the sport, who, seeing things at an odd angle, sometimes really sees them. If Riemann had not devised the non-Euclidean geometry required by Einstein's theory, could that geometry ever have been devised by some snuffling pedant? Or as Einstein himself declared, if Gauss had not invented some of his equations, what reason is there to suppose that anybody would ever have invented them?

Yet Griffenhoek's professional rank is lofty. Certainly his monograph on the 24-dimensional universe of the electron is already a classic.

As I waited for him in my trailer, simmering on the Arizona desert, I mused on the problem I had set him. The problem had vexed me for years; I had consulted academic mathematicians in vain. It is easy to understand—vaguely—what a 1 or a 2 *is*. Vaguely, because there are riddles in Number, just as there are riddles everywhere. But there's a vexing aspect of the imaginary numbers. Exactly what in our world of "reality" corresponds to $\sqrt{-1}$ or i in the same way that a single elm loosely corresponds to the number 1? Nothing, so far as I can see; nothing at all. Yet by the use of $\sqrt{-1}$ bridges and dams are built, the airfoil of a plane is created, electricity is manipulated, and one day soon Mars will be reached.

The surd i is a thing unreal, yet usable; imaginary, yet operative. It is, in fact, a good deal like a thought, which is itself immaterial yet which penetrates the world. Was it Jeans who said that the world itself reminded him of nothing so much as a thought in the mind of God?

A plume of dust. The old snorting Lincoln. And Griffenhoek in a seersucker suit, ancient panama, carrying a large red morocco case. His mustache, I was glad to note, still twitched in feigned wrath.

To nag him further, I began at once, "Mathematics! Pooh! Consider, Griff: we have a mind of a certain limited kind, which perceives the universe in a certain limited way. Very well. In our mind we perceive certain relationships which we call mathematical. Then we slap those relationships on the universe and say *eureka!* the universe is just like our minds. What impudence!"

But Griffenhoek only sighed. Outside in the sun the thermometer stood at 147. Then he mustered strength enough to growl. "Professor of English! Comma counter! Trohee trifler!"

He wiped away the waterfall of sweat from his bald head. Then, fumbling with the awkward clasps of the morocco case, he said, seriously, "According to Pythagoras, numbers are eternal things, the final realities of a misty world. Plato concurs: to him numbers are among those essences, those ultimates, which alone are real." His words rang like a motto prefacing some noble volume; we both became grave at once.

Now the case lay open.

"Oh, magnificent!"

Pleasedly, "You really think so?"

"You know I mean it. Superb!"

For here in the morocco case were artifacts whose purpose I could scarcely guess, but exquisite, like so many lost triumphs from the workshop of Archimedes. A four inch cube with two sides slotted. A track like the track of a toy train, but a mere quarter-inch in gauge, finished like a Cellini masterwork. Flat hieroglyphs, enameled and chased—numbers and esoteric symbols.

FOR a moment I merely gazed and gazed, while Griffenhoek still panted a little and mopped away the renewed

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waterfall from his head. Oh, we are shrewd little fellows nowadays, whacking away like little men. But no longer can we cut intaglios as the Romans did; no longer engrave steel, as the eighteenth century did; for that matter no longer even draw animals as the Cro-Magnons drew them upon the cave walls of Perigord, twenty thousand years ago. Certainly we cannot match the clockwork ingenuities of our ancestors.

For instance: four tiny porcelain figures in perukes and lace cuffs, green coats and rose-satin small clothes. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.* The tiny figures raise tiny bows. Upon tiny violins and cellos the porcelain figurines play a quartet of Mozart. And this is no music box. With tiny bows upon tiny instruments *they* play the quartet; they play it well!

Or a golden birdcage, an inch through. Two jeweled parakeets upon a silver perch. They sidle, grasping the perch with ruby claws. They fluff their throats and twitter. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.*

Or those astonishing Easter eggs made annually for the Czars of Russia. Or the brazen image of Albertus Magnus, endowed with articulate speech. Or chess players, like Moxon's Master; or pianists and swordsmen, some of them never really explained.

Or the figures in Griffenhoek's morocco case. For these seemed to be clockwork figures, for a purpose I could not fathom. "Magnificent. And. . . :?"

Griffenhoek chuckled. "You are like Lord Kelvin. You can't understand a thing unless you see a model of it."

He set the cube upon the trailer linoleum, dainty, superb. Mortising sections of the tiny track, he passed it through the slots of the cube, like a child's railway line passing through a toy tunnel. Then, having wiped his hands carefully, he drew out a flat enameled symbol, a figure 2 with tiny wheels in its base. The wheels fitted on the little track.

Of course I itched to learn about the beautiful toys, yet somehow their very beauty suppressed curiosity, or made curiosity become vulgar. And it occurred to me again how old it is: ours is an age hostile to beauty of finish, whether in manners, language or ethics. Yet this same rude age depends utterly upon science, which is staggering in its finesse of equation and laboratory contrivance. Like most ages, then, our own age disdains the very quality which supports it; and employs television, for example, to publish a prevailing crudity which in time will make even television impossible.

I seemed to hear Copernicus talking of his own theory like an enamored poet, speaking of "a wonderful symmetry," while Kepler adds, "I contemplate its beauty with incredible and ravishing delight. . . ."

But Griffenhoek was saying, "First, suppose we perform a simple operation. Our single cube represents the number 1. Now, we multiply."

He released the figure 2. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.* With the dainty obbligato of a fine watch, the figure 2 ticked into the cube. A delicate chirring. Sauntering like a Restoration jackadandy, the figure emerged, while the cube blurred. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.* And now there were two cubes, one upon the other.

What could I say?

"Now we divide." Once more the 2 minced toward the cube, into it, out. The cubes blurred. Now there was the single cube again.

"And now we divide again." Once more the 2 entered the cube, emerged. And now there was a smaller cube, half the volume of the original.

"Good lord, Griff!"

With a prestidigitator's air, Griffenhoek drew out a negative 2. "Now we multiply again." For several minutes he performed these simple operations. He enjoyed himself. Why not? His manner was elaborate and rehearsed. Penetrated by the negative two, the cube shimmered into transparency, as though it were a cube no longer, but a cube about to be born. It seemed to claim its own position in space, yet at the same time to withdraw from that space, as if pushed through, existing on reality's other side in a form of which the transparency was a symbolic ghost. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.*

Clockwork?

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THERE in the Arizona desert, near the devil's road, the *Camino del Diablo,* among the sullen buttes, sentineled by giant Saguaro cacti, in a trailer cooled by a humming box—there the exquisite toys marched and countermarched.

At last Griffenhoek chuckled. "Now! I seem to remember that you were troubled by the square root of minus one?"

"Well, damn it all, Griff. Minus one *has* no square root. How in the devil can you take a square root which can't be taken? What *is* the square root of minus one, anyhow? Oh, of course, you mathematicians pretend to take it, just by putting the sign of the radical over minus one. But what then?"

Griffenhoek chuckled again. From his morocco case he withdrew a model surd, $\sqrt{-1}$. He engaged its wheels upon the tiny track. "Multiply?"

The surd minced toward the cube, into it, out. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.*

And now the cube was shivered. Now it, too, was a model surd, $\sqrt{-1}$. Yet, with all the cube's material drawn into the slender lines of the surd, there seemed to be no cogs, no gears.

"But how on earth! And anyhow, this is just another surd. What *is* the thing that *this* thing symbolizes?"

Griffenhoek smiled. He restored his cube to its original form. "And now, Lanson, now we divide. On paper we merely make a fraction of it, placing the one over the surd. But observe."

The surd entered the cube with the elegance of a Venetian macaroni, through it, out. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.* A blur of movement. It was like a man hastily stripping off his coat, leaving the sleeves pulled inward by his hurry. The blur resolved. The cube was *inside out.*

"Good God, Griff!"

Now he played with his toys; restored the cube; doubled it; caused it to waver, a gossamer cube; restored it again. Outside, the sun hammered and a hairy scorpion scuttled for shade beneath an ironwood root. Inside. . . .

"Magnificent toys, Griff."

"Toys?"

"Beautiful toys, but. . . ."

"Toys?"

"Well, clockwork, aren't they?"

"Clockwork?"

With his morocco case Griffenhoek marched out the trailer door onto the Arizona desert. My trailer's parked on a twenty-five cent acre of land, six miles from town. A friend drilled my well; the power line is tapped for lights and the air-conditioner. An odd way to live? Consider how rare are quiet and peace.

Twenty feet from the door squats a little boulder, glittering with mica.

"Watch." Already the sun had drawn its waterfall down his face.

He rolled the little boulder onto a silvery sheet. Then he seemed to aim his tiny track directly at the boulder. Under the savage sun his eyes were socketed in deep shadow; he looked like a prophet in some dreadful valley of the East.

Then, in a froth and blur, the boulder was made gossamer, was doubled, was turned inside out. Griffenhoek played with it as a candymaker plays with a twist of soft taffy.

Clockwork?

"How shall I leave your little rock, Lanson? Doubled? Transparent?"

"For God's sake, leave it as it was."

"Ah, you love your ugly little rock, perhaps?"

"A damned ugly rock, but I was used to it."

Withdrawing the silvery sheet he said, "You may thank your gods for this, Lanson."

"I do."

BACK in the trailer again, Griffenhoek patted his morocco case. "You know, perhaps I ought to destroy these."

"Destroy?—You couldn't, Griff. Could you destroy the cathedral of Chartres or burn up every copy of Shakespeare?"

Then he grew immensely serious. "I know what I'd like to do with them."

I waited, gazing at the desert.

Griffenhoek said, "Oh, they think I'm a crackpot; quaint old dodderer. And what do you suppose I think of *them?*"

He still resembled an angry prophet. "I do not like them, Lanson. I do not much like this world of ours, any more: imbeciles screeching the word "prog-

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ress" in a world dedicated to a swinish mediocrity; politicians who live by taking in each other's whitewashing; aimless decadents gawking through a career of chomping popcorn at idiot movies or honking from nowhere to nowhere in a fetor of gasoline and burnt rubber."

I had to grin. "A mad world, my masters. But that was said centuries ago."

Griffenhoek chuckled at his own rhetoric, then burst out passionately. "What a foul paradox, Lanson! Science is a pure quest; true science is the immaculate exercise of reason in behalf of fact. Because it is pure, it is successful. And being successful, it is preyed upon, its technology subverted to a dirty multiplication of gadgets, toys for cretins, chrome-plate for the Chambers of Commerce. Thus baboonery, scratching its fleas, be-slimes the intellect!

"Damn this world, Lanson, and damn all the whey-faced ninnies in it."

A sheepish smile. A tired grin. His mood wore out. But then he grew serious again. "I mean it, Lanson. Damn this world. Or—most of it, anyhow."

I glanced at the morocco case. "Well?"

"Oh, I shall be fair. First of all there shall be a warning given."

"Eh?"

"A *mene mene tekel upharsin* legible in the very skies. In any case," he added, "next month I am required to join the rocket laboratory at Desindio. Perhaps they will permit me to make pretty little toys for the commanding general's brats."

He chuckled; the wrath was gone. Almost dreamily he said, "Of course the rocket will carry instruments. . ." Then he said, firmly, "But first a warning."

I wasn't sure in what spirit to answer.

GRIFFENHOEK wrote me once, a letter smuggled past the Desindio censorship and mailed from Santa Fe. It was good to hear him snort again: "Waste! I thought I'd seen waste among federal malingerers in bureau offices, but. . ." Or "What a crew! Goggle-eyed ranters who think electrons are pink, or maybe octahedral, or maybe shaped like a baby unicorn!" Or "The army! They insist on quartering me with officers, some of whom can read and write."

Underneath the invective, though, I sensed a satisfaction with progress. And then . . . June, 1955.

Just what emotions boiled in Griffenhoek, do you suppose, as he stealthily inserted his hieroglyphs and his timers? To tamper with nature is a troubling thing: to gouge the earth, to fell a redwood, to dam a river—these are in a way all acts of impudence. But to blur the very lantern of our sky itself!

And what emotions, do you suppose, boil in Griffenhoek now? Returned to the university, he is my good friend still. But he has sequestered a corner of his mind. I nag him, beg him, scold him. But he only answers, "Me, Lanson? Me? What are you talking about."

Yet for all his bravado I think I sense in him a preying guilt, as though over some dreadful impiety.

And I? Well, few elementary textbooks provide the delicious shivers of a Machen or a James. Yet over and over, with profound unease, I read a simple passage in a high school *Elements of Geology:*

> When the Earth was torn out of the gassy fabric of the sun by some errant star, its surface solidified quickly. Within fifteen thousand years, Earth was solidly encrusted, although this crust from time to time collapsed inward upon a core which contracted a little as it cooled. Such collapses, perhaps six or seven of them, formed Earth's mountains. . . .
>
> But the core is liquid still, molten at prodigious temperatures. If volcanos have not already been convincing, to descend deep into any mine is to learn that the core of the earth is a furnace. . . .
>
> GANYMEDE PLEASURE CLUB

A pretty thought!

In fact, it might be as well to heed my friend Griffenhoek. It would be improper of him, it would be maniacal, to act against us. Still, perhaps we should try a little harder to make sense.

Otherwise, someday. . . .

Tick-tick-tick-tick.

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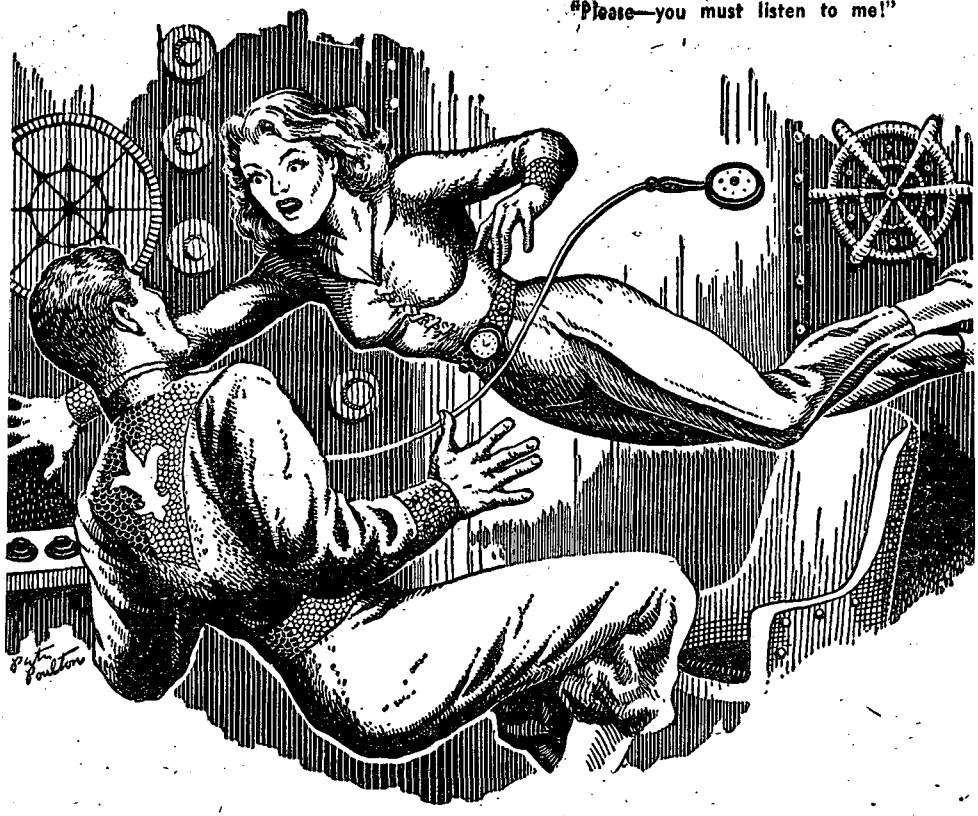

"Please—you must listen to me!"

LILA

By PETER PHILLIPS

THE producer gave me the high-sign, a light flashed and I went into the routine. "This is Buzz Boothby, the Voice of the System, bringing you Tomorrow's News Today!"

Then I saw a new face appear behind the glass of the control box. Her face. And I fluffed on the air for the first—and I hope the last—time.

A few billion people, including my sponsors of the moment (an inhalant for off-gravity sickness—you know the one) heard me refer to Venusian president Telik Syka as selik tyka which in Venerian means something like "ponderous moron."

He had to stop the girl from asking a question, and wound up by answering the belle. . . .

I gripped the desk and kept my eyes grimly on the script, refusing to look up at the scanner in case I glimpsed the girl from the corner of my eye. When I was through, the customers saw me plunge off the screen before the operator could cut back to the announcer.

I threw open the door of the control booth. "How did she get in here?" The girl cowered back from my outthrust finger.

Frensen, the producer, blinked. "Why

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—uh—she just brought in some coffee from the cafeteria. What's eating you, Buzz?"

I took a long, controlling breath and advanced on the girl. "Out," I said. "And so help me, if I see you again, I'll be turning myself in to the homicide bureau. OUT!"

"Please Mr. Boothby, I must talk to you—"

I grabbed her shoulders, spun her out into the corridor, slammed the door and leaned on it. There was a thud. She'd fallen. Good.

"Tut. Shouldn't treat ladies like that even if they are dunning you for alimony."

"She's no lady. I don't know her. I've spent the last three months trying not to know her. And if she turns up again, her own mother won't know her when I'm through."

"Not the words of a gentleman, Buzz, even in these days of sex equality. Though some say the word 'gentleman' doesn't appear in your extensive vocabulary. That was a dirty crack about Belle Blamey."

"Pay dirt," I said. "A stereo star should live clean. I'm not running a children's hour."

Frensen shrugged. "What's with this baby? Maybe she just wants to ask where you got those big innocent blue eyes."

I sat down. I explained. Three months ago the girl came up to me at a reception, said she had some information for me but that it was private and could she speak to me alone.

That gag, I told her, was worthy of a line in my next program. Information given to me ceased to be private from that moment.

"All right, then," she said, "I just wanted to ask you a favor."

"Publicity, uh? My secretary handles that kind of favor. Or ask one of my legmen. Or write it down, post it. I'm sorry, but can't you see I'm tied up?" I didn't mean to be discourteous, but she'd button-holed me in the middle of a very interesting four-way conversation about a secret Martian trade-pact that would cease to be secret as soon as I'd heard a little more; and I was hopping anxious to get back into it.

The brush made her mad. "Pretty exclusive, Mr. Boothby, aren't you?"

"In effect, I'm the least exclusive person in the whole System. Hear all, see all, say all. But there are times to ask favors and ways of asking them. You're out on both counts, lady. Now if you'll excuse me—"

When I got back into the fray after the interruption, the ambassador had been jogged in the ribs by his aide, and realized he'd been opening his mouth too wide. I missed that story.

So when the girl bobbed up again just as I was pulling out, I was so annoyed I merely said, "No," and got into my 'copter. I asked Spach, my pilot and remembrancer, whether he knew her. He shook his head. I said, "Good. Keep her out of my office and out of my hair." If she'd been anyone of any account, Spach would have placed her.

SINCE that night, I told Frensen, the girl had haunted me. She'd pop out at me in hotel lobbies, she'd park herself in the manicurist's chair in my barbershop. Once she'd gotten into my office hidden under a blonde wig. Once she'd trapped me alone in an elevator, and I'd had to jam my fingers in my ears for thirty storeys.

"Hell, I even look twice at the attendant in the men's room," I groaned.

"Wouldn't it be simpler to listen?"

"And be licked by that kid?"

Frensen grinned. "Aren't you curious to know what it is?"

"Curious? I'm mad to know what it is. I'm eaten up, I'm burned away by curiosity to know what it is that that girl is making it her life's work to tell me. But she won't write it down, she won't tell anyone else except me. AND I WON'T LISTEN!"

"Did your sister bite you when you were a kid? You're behaving childishly. Frankly, Boothby," Frensen said calmly, "I dislike you. You're just a keyhole-

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peeper with an overstuffed ego. Does that rate a line on your program? And how you handled a girl so hard she fell in the corridor?"

"I dislike you, Frensen," I said with equal calm. "I can't afford to like people. And only really smart insults rate air time with me. As for the girl, that was an accident. If I see her again, I'll apologize nicely—and run like hell."

But I didn't apologize, and I couldn't run when lovely Lila finally caught up with me. I had time to learn her name, to realize that she was lovely and to gather a few other facts about her. And I nearly had all eternity to ponder about them.

I was taking a vacation trip to Venus aboard the luxury Solar Queen. I was in the observation section, sitting in one of those chairs fitted with a working miniature of the ship's control panel. It's a sop to the eternal boy in man. You can play at being pilot. I've seen sixty-year-old Firth Craig of Electronords glaring at the panel half-hypnotized, muttering orders under his breath into an imaginary intercom.

A space-belle leaned over me to check my belt and murmured politely, "Fascinating isn't it?"

"You!"

"Uh-huh. It's taken me five days to bribe and wheedle my way into the first-class quarters, or I'd have seen you sooner. Now listen, Mr. Boothby—"

I struggled to unfasten my belt. "Get away from me. This is my vacation. I don't care what you have to tell me. It wouldn't interest me if the captain's wife stepped in here and did a no-gravity dance in her underwear. She wouldn't get a line of publicity, good or bad. I'm not working, d'you understand?"

"I have nothing to tell you. And keep your belt on, as well as your hair. Deceleration will be resumed in a few moments."

Something had gone wrong with that damned belt. Maybe she'd fixed it so I just had to sit there and listen. "For four months," I said, "you've been trying to get me to listen to you. Now you say you have nothing to tell me."

"It's just a small favor. I don't want publicity—"

"Do I plug my fingers in my ears or grab this phone and howl for help?"

Several passengers were looking round and making ears at us. The girl flushed. One overweight tycoon winked at me and gave a soft wolf-whistle. I recognized him and made a mental note to dig up some dirt about him when I resumed my programs.

Even in my anger, I realized that the girl merited a whistle or two. Hostesses aboard the Queen wear silver-grey pantaloons, fixed at the ankles, red-buttoned vests and caps with a narrow peak. The uniform tells the truth about their figures and hers could bear the truth. Her hair was inches longer than regulation cut and it massed out from under the cute cap like a black waterfall.

A water*fall*. At least I could permit myself to be curious about that. "How do you fix your hair so it doesn't float around in free fall?" I asked casually.

She looked surprised at my change in tone. "Magnetal tape braided in the ends and a couple of bars stitched in the shoulders," she said quickly, hope coming into her eyes.

"Smart idea."

"Thanks. Now will you listen—"

"No. I really am on holiday, kid. But rather than have you haunting me the rest of my life and popping up through the bath-plug, I promise I'll give you five minutes when I'm back in my office. How's that?"

"But I must speak with you before this trip's over. I've been on a long vacation from the University, and I have to go straight back. It may be months before I have the chance again. This can't wait—"

"It can."

"But—"

I reached for the phone.

She drifted away. There was something in her violet eyes and the set of her young mouth that I didn't like. Perhaps she'd use a spanner to open the conversation next time.

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The fat passenger over the way called, "Hey miss, do you mind checking my belt."

As she leaned over him, he rested a hand on her back and gave me a confiding, lecherous smirk. I looked away quickly. Tomason was his name. The stuff I could dig up about that fat boy. I refused to wonder why I was so annoyed by him.

I got Jeesel, the infinitely tactful personnel clerk, on the line. When I sorted out his Martian accent, I got a picture of a healthy, forceful college-type, who'd signed on as space-belle for the there-and-back trip. Name, Elizabeth Crassel. Diminutive, Lila. Excellent references.

"Probably forged," I said. "She isn't a professional space-belle."

"You like herrr, Meester Bozz?" Jeesel curled a tentacle in his version of a wink.

"No," I lied.

"Too bad. Or good, maybeee. Because, Meester Bozz, she don't." He wrinkled up the skin around his eyes in what the Martians use for a leer and flashed off my visiplate before I could ask what he meant.

For creatures with as much sex as an oyster, the inhabitants of Mars have developed quite an insight into Terran hormonal reactions in the fifty years they've been working with us.

FIVE minutes later, after the usual three-pip warning, the G's came on again. My belt gave way and I nearly pushed my nose through the observation panel.

I did first-aid with a handkerchief, and pressed a bell. Instead of the vision in pearl-grey that I expected, a waiter climbed up.

"She's gone off," he said shortly, anticipating my query. "I'm not pretty, but I can carry coffee. Or maybe you want a medical corpsman?"

"Coffee," I said, "with a trace of civility."

The bellhop tribe has sadly degenerated since the gentle *pourboire* was abolished.

He walked off to get it. The observation section had been rotated to give us gravity where we wanted it—from the feet down. Other passengers were loosening their belts and stamping their feet in relief. It's good to have weight again after free fall.

A card game was resumed and drinks were ordered. Straight drinks in open glasses, not spigot cups. I relaxed for a while and waited for my coffee. I've never suffered from off-G sickness, but I still prefer to have an up and down.

I saw the waiter coming and got my brandy flask out to liven the coffee.

I warded off a globule of scalding liquid with the flask, and caught the waiter as he floated by. His mouth and eyes popped wide open. He grabbed my shoulders. "What's happened, sir? Gravity isn't due off for a couple of hours yet. Have we been hit?"

There was a sickness in my stomach, but I had to keep up a pose. Who ever saw Buzz Boothby feazed by anything? A matronly blonde up front gave a little scream as her martini balled itself up and floated wetly into her face. Cards from the poker school floated at me. I brushed them off like flies.

I told the waiter gently, "It's not part of a passenger's duty to reassure members of the ship's staff in an emergency. Go find yourself a crewman. Perhaps the captain is just getting rid of a touch of indigestion."

No-gravity is the best known specific for flatulence.

A middle-aged woman swam around muttering, "I'd just loosened my damn girdle. Now I got to tighten it again. What a way to run a ship."

Three kids swarmed in from the adjacent saloon and resumed their game of three-dimensional tag which had been interrupted when the G's went on. I shoved the waiter away, and began to think.

Tomason kicked his way over to me. "Something you know about, Boothby?" He's the kind of man who makes an assertion into a question. I wasn't as gentle with him as I was with the waiter.

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I'd jammed my knees tight under the "control" panel, giving me leverage. As he ballooned helplessly away from my outthrust hand he shouted: "I won't forget that. Figure you own the System, don't you? But I know some of your sponsors and—"

One of the playing kids caromed off his stomach and he quit yelling. He didn't worry me. He had millions. But I had millions of listeners and the freedom of the air—and sponsors lining up for me.

The speakers crooned the attention signal and a voice said, "Ladies and gentlemen, a slight power fault which is being corrected immediately, has necessitated resumption of free-fall conditions before schedule. Deceleration will be resumed as soon as possible. There is no cause for alarm."

Was that so . . . I grunted disbelief. If things don't happen to strict routine on a luxury craft like the Queen, something is quite, quite wrong. There's a full-dress inquiry if ships of that class jet down half-an-hour off schedule. The decelerometer on my panel showed zero.

It's useful, having a name. There were several people I could ring. Chaim Mason, chief engineer, was one. But he would be busy. So I buzzed Jeesel again, spoke softly. He'd know.

"Za real trouble, Meester Bozz? You have jos' heard—"

"How many?" I asked bluntly.

He-she-or-it waved disclaiming tentacles.

"Listen, you eight-footed beauty, you could insulate from here to the stern and I'd still know when a jet had blown."

He mutely held up five tentacles, and cut off.

Five jets blown, 45 hours to go, twenty of which should be on full deceleration—and they said no cause for alarm!

I KICKED out after my waiter who was just disappearing into his cubby-hole at the end of the section. Somehow, on the way, despite the sickness in my stomach, I managed a grin for the kids who were playing tag.

Inside the cubby, "Scotch," I told the waiter, "in the biggest spigot cup you've got. Have one yourself."

Then Lila hauled herself in, making adjustments to her uniform.

"Thought you were off duty?"

"General order to keep passengers calm, hold their hands, smooth their fevered brows. As a seasoned traveler, you have no moral call on my services."

"I wouldn't be interested in a moral call. Have a sip."

She put the spigot to her lips, made a vinegar face.

"I don't drink."

"It's now or never to start."

She impelled the cup back to me. I expertly enlipped the Scotch spilled from the spout.

The excited, wavering chatter of the first-class passengers outside came clearly to our ears through the thin cubby door, with an unpredictable rise-and-fall in volume as the speakers turned and floated. They all converged on the observation section when the break in routine came.

"It's an outrage!" That was Tomason.

"Are they playing a joke with us? I shall have something to say about this." —Marie Maren, Golden Voice of the Stars.

". . . last time I'll use a luxury ship for a business trip, even if it is quicker."

". . . and so I said to my agent, if you could only fix a spot of non-gravity while I did my act, we'd wow the world. Imagine me doing a slow cartwheel in front of the customers . . . and he said something about Newton and Bergson censoring the show, unless we did it in space with the customers tied into their seats . . . hey, are those boys agents? So I said you have to tie them down now, so—" Jean Rofolle, strip-specialist, currently touring with Three Worlds Entertainments, drifted from hearing.

". . . Henry, can't you do something about this? I was just about to have my dinner."

". . . hey, Mom, come in the game. It's real fun."

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LILA said, questioning, "Nice little story for you, I suppose?" I gave her the book, in gobbledegook. "Something X, plus speed, over the gravitic constant of Venus equals a safe landing. And since X usually represents a minus quantity—deceleration in the equation—and we're not decelerating—"

"We hit?"

"No. We miss."

"So?" She preened a black curl under her cap. There was puzzlement beneath her unconcern.

"We broil," I said. "In the sun."

"Bake, you mean."

"Broil," I asserted. "We broil before we bake."

"That's crazy. We can make grazing orbits." She was frowning.

"Not at this speed."

"Well, it must be a simple repair. We won't broil, bake, fry or be barbecued if the C.E. knows his business, surely?"

Tiny spherical driblets of liquor oozed from the corners of the waiter's mouth as he burped his dismay. "Listen, mister, and you, Miss Lila—this is my first trip. It may be my last. I don't want to hear the end in terms of domestic cookery. Can't you discuss your menu elsewhere?"

Lila laughed. "Sorry, Limey." She patted his fair, thinning hair. "I suppose you're allergic to sunshine. With that fair skin, I guess you blister before you tan."

That was perfect. I've heard funnier cracks in the morgue, in the days when I legged it around the precincts with the crime boys. The last ship that failed to decelerate on time at this point, at this velocity, was spotted as the merest blink on a photometerplate when a great fiery tongue licked out from the sun and devoured it.

The waiter said, "Let me out," and made for the door.

"Hadn't you better get on with your hand-holding and your brow-smoothing?" I asked Lila.

"There's no panic," said Lila. Then she hit me with the blunt end of a comet. "I just had to talk with you, before this trip's over. People come together when there's an accident. I thought there would be a delay . . . there's no real danger is there? Somehow it's easier to put things over when there's no gravity."

True horror lies in the perversion of normality. Horror comes in things that are so inane they're laughable—until the thought explodes in the brain that they are intended quite seriously.

My mind, trained to take a ten-word flash and expand it into a sixty-second explanation, had slid well ahead of Lila's hesitant words.

A passenger is looking at the sliding, slow-heaving billows of the salt sea, in the days when men traveled the ocean in iron ships.

And a pretty female comes up to him and says, "I've just pulled the plug out—" or whatever it was you had to do to sink those things—"and now we can have a nice quiet chat."

Not a good metaphor. In those days, you could put the plug back. Or swim. In space, heading for Sol, or a mile-deep hole in the crust of a planet, you could put the plug back. Or pray.

I didn't know that I'd grabbed Lila's wrists until her staring violet eyes and her whimpering scream returned me to sanity.

I had a quick picture of her sprawling in a corridor of Three-World-Video Corporation. But there was no shame in me.

"You condign fool. You ninny-patted microcephalic dimwitted little drip—what have you done?"

She twisted her bruised wrists from my grip and kicked back out of my reach. She made noises like a spaniel that gets a rap on the snout in place of an expected bone.

I lowered my voice, spoke slowly, precisely. "What exactly did you do?"

"You've hurt me," she moaned.

I breathed prayers to several pagan gods — wherever they might be — up, down, around or about—in this hurtling little world. Sweet Sappho, if you were the first of women with imagination, maybe you were the last. . . .

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"Don't you understand?" I asked. "Can you kill 160 people in a particularly horrible way without imagining their agony?"

She moaned again, "What do you mean . . . you've hurt me."

That's what got me about Lila. That's what gets me about most brainy women—one moment analyzing the universe, the next, blowing it apart because they don't know the difference between gunpowder and face-powder. Their blind spots are unpredictable.

Obviously, astrogation was Lila's blind spot.

Though how in the seven hells she'd managed to get near the drive-chambers. . . .

I COULD hear those kids playing their three-dimensional tag outside. I floated over to Lila. There must have been something strange and frightening in my face even before I closed my hands round her warm neck and put my thumbs in a leverage position.

Please remember—I wasn't quite sane.

"I didn't know," she gasped.

"That's pretty obvious. What did you do?"

"One of the engineers let me onto the cat-walk under the converter. I flipped a button into one of the intakes. I'm a good shot, flipping things, thumb-and-finger—"

You think that such a type is a psychological impossibility? The cool, competent smoother of brows, with homey reassurance for worried travelers—the cute college miss, near her majority in philosophy—and the hopelessly dumb female whose soft neck was under my thumbs . . . all one and the same person.

And she'd flipped a metal button into the converter.

Some of that button was vapor a few thousand miles back, mingled with our ion-trail. The rest of it had become a microfilm spread around the works, damping the out-phase cooling effect, so that a third of the main jets had blown, spitting out gassy metal from their linings.

Why make drivers so vulnerable? Why let a saboteur throw his sabot into the cogs of a weaving machine? Why let someone with a fistful of sand get near oiled bearings in a factory?

Once I saw a guy thrust his finger into a relay in a roomful of integrator. He lost his finger, but the mathematicians lost four weeks of calculations. He complained they were getting too near a mathematical expression for God, and he didn't want to be around when that happened. He wasn't.

I took my hands from Lila's neck. "Consider yourself under citizen's arrest," I told her. I shoved her away from the door, locked us both in the steward's cubby.

As I said before, it's useful having a name. The switchboard girl gave me Chaim Mason, the chief engineer, without argument. There was no vision on the cubby-hole circuit, but I could imagine the sweat on his face.

"Can't chat, Buzz, old man," came his controlled voice. "Come down here and see me sometime. Sometime. Awfully busy, old fellow, honestly."

For a sweet spot of meiosis, give me an Oxford graduate every time.

"If, my cherubic old chappie," I mimicked, "you had tacked the wire grid of a ten-cent fly-swat over a certain little hole in your converter before blasting off, you wouldn't be so busy. None so blind as engineers who can see everything. Even if you get your linings back in time, they'll blow again when you turn up the wick."

That caught his ears. He listened, he mixed profuse thanks to me with obscene objurgations against Lila—and the lovesick engineer who'd let her into the converter section—and dashed away to get an entire new assembly jacked into place.

I flicked off the phone. "And those things," I told a thoroughly-frightened Lila, "cost a great deal of money. So unless you can meet a bill for a half-million dollars and bear the thought for the rest of your days that you put the lives of 160 people in jeopardy—maybe you'd better pray we *do* hit the sun."

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There was another call I had to make. To the captain. But I felt numb with a kind of reluctant disgust. Those are the wrong words, but I can't find better ones.

I should have been disgusted, but I could see Lila.

She floated there in the cubby, eyes wet, gravity-free clothing rippling around her in the most intriguing fashion.

And I was reluctant at the thought of consigning her to the brig.

But duty is a powerful word, even when it's used by a heel like me. I looked at Lila, took the phone and asked for Captain Harry Sobeen.

I knew him socially and professionally. I'd investigated him professionally when a birdie brought me word of slight strain between Harry and his second wife, Fania. And I'd put over a pretty think-piece about the space-bronzed lieutenants who were squiring Fania around the New York spots while Sobeen was planet-hopping.

Soon afterwards, I'd met Sobeen socially at a coming-out jamboree. Instead of taking a swing at me like most of the potential cuckolds I flash-lined on my programme, he took my hand, presented me with a large dry Martini, and thanked me for telling the System—and the divorce judge—what kind of woman she was.

So I knew him well enough. But before I got him on the line, Lila, a silken, black-headed javelin, streaked out from her corner, knocked the phone from my hand and arced her whole body over the panel. She grabbed two supporting struts and held herself there.

"Please—you must listen to me first."

She'd kicked me to the opposite side of the cubby in her frenzy. I said, "I've studied invective in four languages. I can rake up more pejoratives from my memory than any man between here and Neptune. But the big bad words are too wholesome for you. It's mean, niggling, nugatory words that best express what I feel about you. You're a petty creature, a silly, unthinking little girl. Get away from that phone."

I worked up to a shout. She hadn't really cried before. But she did now, a veritable torrent, as she was still straining backwards over the phone panel. She shook her head. The droplet tears floated away from her eyes.

"Don't, please. Give me the big cuss-words if you like. But listen first . . . don't make me feel any worse! I only did it so I could talk with you—"

I listened. I couldn't stand it. What did a few minutes matter? The disjointed, throaty phrasing the supplicating wriggle of an admonished pup . . . I could have unlocked the door and used another phone, or got a purchase and torn her away.

But I listened. "Talk," I said, "to the point. And fast."

Jeesel told me her name was Elizabeth Crassel.

"It's Elizabeth Sobeen," she said. "By Daddy's first wife. He thinks I'm still at college—"

"But—"

"He doesn't know I'm aboard. He mustn't know. Captains don't have to see space-belles. That's the personnel clerk's business. I faked some papers and spun Jeesel a story. He took me on."

Those slithering Martians would swallow anything, I thought. They don't have females, so they don't have the concept of deceit.

"And all this just to talk to me?"

SHE nodded. "I knew you were taking a vacation. You see, my mother is sure you can help her. She's sure Daddy wants to get back to her, and it's only his fool pride that's stopping him. There's only one man in the System he'll listen to on a subject of that kind. Because he knows if he doesn't listen, that man can make a fool of him—and pride's the only real thing he's got left."

Delicious, eh? Daughter of one of the best and toughest jet-masters in the System perjures herself to get a semi-menial job aboard his latest command.

Object: to bedevil, suborn, ensnare or otherwise seduce and coerce me into persuading her poppa to jet up alongside her momma again.

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Method: flipping metal button into delicate works of vessel imperiling lives of all aboard. . . .

I groaned. This mature-infant-wise-jane-homicidal-damned-farceuse must be quite mad. This colt-limbed, black-haired, red-lipped, wide-eyed girl must be—a singular young person.

The stars were bangles in her midnight hair. . . .

I looked away, but looked back. Maybe I'd never seen her before. "Don't you know your own father better than that? And what's your mother doing with her pride? Saving it for a rainy day? I'm crazy to be listening to you. I'll be crazier to go on listening."

Came a gaze of pellucid innocence. Such a look might turn the heart of the Sphinx to water or melt the Abominable Snowman.

At that moment I would have welcomed the appearance through the deck of a dozen rattle-jointed skeletons to dance a no-gravity saraband around us. The situation couldn't be crazier.

"We'll talk to Captain Sobeen now," I said firmly, dragging my mind back from irrelevant visions.

"You do understand them? You will help me?"

I breathed deep. "You want me to blackmail your father into relinquishing his masculine pride so that your mother may retain her feminine vanity? You want me to threaten the captain of a vessel in space with an exposure of his own amorous peccadilloes unless he crawls back on hands and knees to his first love, your mother? You want—"

"You," said Lila, recovering composure in a near-miraculous way, "are talking like a nineteenth-century novel in questionable taste. Mom and Pop are both comparatively young. They love each other, and I want to see them together again. And incidentally, I've just decided I'm very, very fond of you."

She brought her knees up to her chin—did I mention she had a dimple there, and that she had a very straight nose?—and slowly revolved, like a somersaulting kitten in slow-motion.

"Now you can phone Daddy," she said.

It wasn't necessary. The metal-voiced community speaker came in dead on cue. And if you don't believe in tiny coincidences, you'll never get fun out of big ones.

It said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the minor adjustment that necessitated resumption of free-fall before schedule has been made. Deceleration will now be resumed. We regret this will entail the imposition of two gravities for the remainder of our journey. Passenger staff will supervise observation of on-gravity regulations immediately. Thank you."

The speaker paused. I muttered, "'Minor adjustment' is good. Remind me to congratulate Chaim Mason on the slickest tube-change I ever heard of."

Then the voice bleeped out again, "The captain requests the pleasure of the company of Mr. Boothby and Miss Elizabeth Crassel in his cabin."

Chaim had anticipated me in his report.

THE G's came on as we were halfway there, after the usual three-pip warning. We adjusted our stomachs and heavily climbed the rest.

"You first, please," said Lila. "I'll wait outside."

I knocked, went in. I carried a glimpse of her slightly-flushed face and violet eyes in my retinae.

Captain Harry Sobeen looked up over his square, surprisingly youthful jaw. "'Lo Bob. Didn't know you were with us. Sit. My C.E., Chaim Mason, reports that you gave him certain information. Helped to save the ship. I'm grateful. Don't have to say more than that. You're the word-peddler, not me."

Sobeen regarded his blunt nails. "Mason also said something about a hostess, Miss Crassel. Something I didn't care to believe. You told him that she had—that—dammit, you made an allegation of sabotage! If you can repeat that statement in her presence—she's been asked to report here, as you heard—I shall, of course, have a grave duty to perform."

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I couldn't think away that vision of Lila's flushed, appealing face.

Sure I'm a heel. With my job, news is news. But there is news and news. And right then, I preferred the better sort. And I launched into the best impromptu spiel of my life. I deadpanned. "What are you talking about?"

"Throwing a button—"

"*Throwing?* Something got twisted on the line. Or maybe Chaim Mason needs an ear test. I said *'floating.'* This kid was rubbering around the catwalk when the tubes blew and the G's went off. Then she saw a button or something like that drifting through the office. She got out of the way when the boys started milling around, came back to Observation.

"Then she started thinking about this button. She takes a very intelligent interest in the working of the ship. That's why she wheedled her way into Drive Section. And she realized this button might be important.

"She didn't want to tell anyone in authority for a very special reason, so she told me. She knew I'd know how to handle it. I figured right away the converter would still have been hot enough to vaporize the thing, and damp the phase-cooler so that when you replaced or relined the jets they'd blow again—unless you jacked in a new assembly altogether.

"So I called Chaim. He's got the whole thing mixed. In fact, it's this kid you've got to thank for saving the ship. If she hadn't told me about it, reasoning it was important—"

Sobeen kept his eyes on my face the whole time. If I ever lose this job, I'll go in for video acting.

I could see his relief. He wanted to believe me.

But there was still a trace of doubt in his voice when he asked, "What was the 'very special reason' this girl didn't want to inform anyone in direct authority?"

"Because it might have got back to you. She didn't want you to know she was aboard. Wanted to make the grade on a tough job without help from up top."

I grinned at him. That pay-off was my immediate reward.

Sobeen stood up, knuckles white on his desk. "You mean—?"

I called: "Come in, Elizabeth."

Talk ensued. Much talk. Three-way, two-way talk. When Lila had left the cabin to get herself fitted for a medal, I said to Captain Harry Sobeen, "I hear Mary, your first wife, and the mother of that kid, has been pining for you, old-timer. It's none of my business, but—"

It was a pretty powerful—"but." They're remarried now.

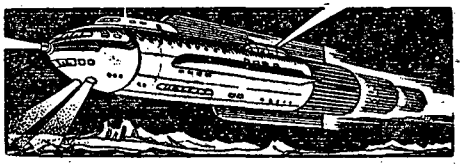
What I did to keep Chaim Mason's gaping mouth shut is nobody's business.

And Lila, sweet, wise, foolish, oh-so-lovely Lila, in whose midnight hair the stars were bangles. . . .

I've never forgotten Lila.

She won't let me.

See this s l i g h t l y-discoloured eye? After the double wedding, she proved to have a pretty fierce temper among her other qualities.



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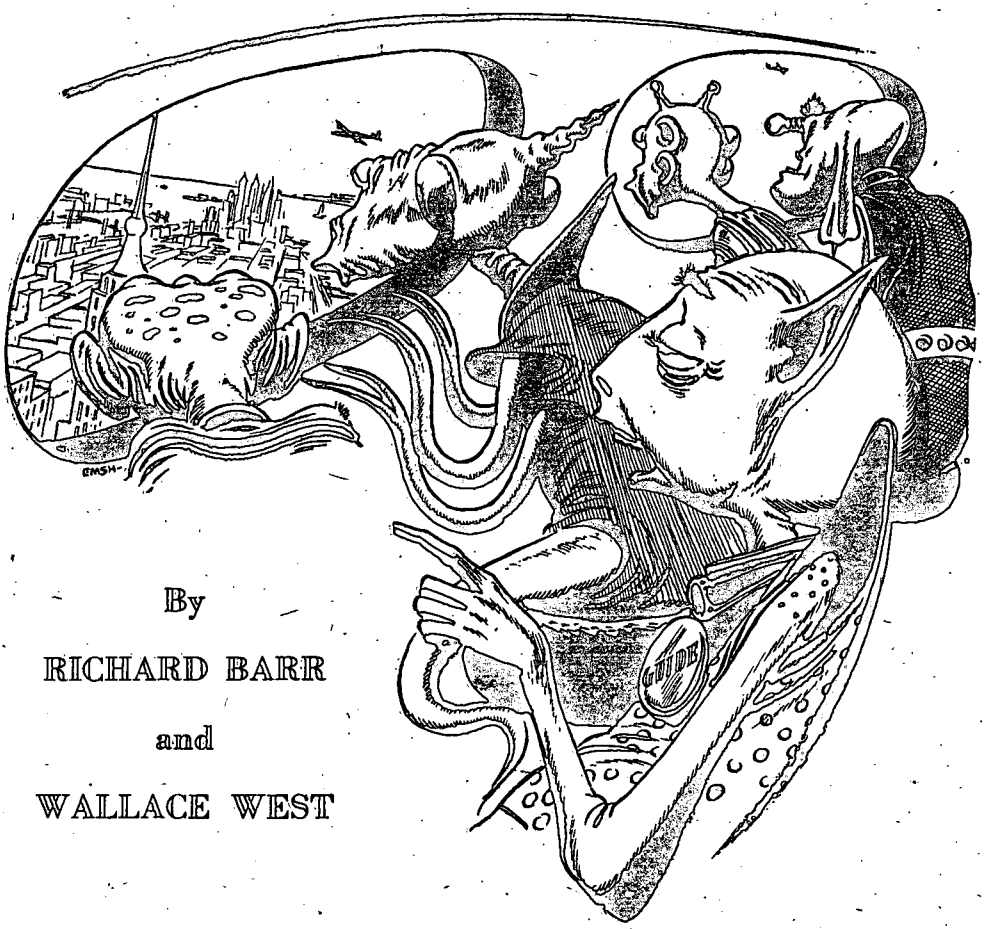

By

RICHARD BARR

and

WALLACE WEST

ON YOUR right, ladies and gentlemen, you can see the headwaters of the Hudson River .... Pardon me, sir? Will you speak a bit louder? ... Oh yes. That village we just passed, the one surrounded by a log stockade, was Albany, a fur-trading center that becomes the capital of New York state ... No, witchcraft trials such as we witnessed in Massachusetts never found favor this far south. Albany *was* involved in some hair-raising Indian massacre, however ...

"Here's a message from our pilot: We're travelling at 5,000 meters. Our speed is 3,500 kilometers an hour. We are precessing at the rate of only ten years per minute. No need for your belts just yet. ...

"The smoke just ahead and to the left is caused by the firing of flintlock rifles and small cannon during the Battle of

They were on a pleasure jaunt to a primitive little town called New York

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Harlem Heights. Generalissimo Washington is retreating before a British attack. We'll circle the battle site for a few minutes to give you all a better view. The American Revolution has some sentimental interest although it was really nothing but a skirmish. Only a few thousand Americans were killed during the entire seven year campaign . . . Excuse me, madame? . . . Yes, your little boy has time to go before our next hop. . . .

"The battle is over now, folks, so lock your precession belts. We're about to make another time hop. Ready? *Oops!* Didn't hurt a bit, did it? Heh, heh, heh.

"To your left you now can glimpse Lon Giland Sound. Up ahead is the New York City of 1860, just before the War Between the Civils. That pincushion effect at the lower end of Manhattan Island? Let me take another look. Oh! It is caused by the masts of sailing ships. Notice that group slightly to the left—the vessels with such fine hull lines. Those are the famous Clippers you've read about. They were first built, we are told, to bring tea from China before it became stale.

"Now we'll take a five-year jump . . . . You there! Stick that tentacle out of the porthole again and you'll draw back a nub! The ship's blasters will burn it to a crisp as we trenk. What? Okay. So it *better* not happen again. We don't want to be sued by the Venus Tourist Cartel. . . .

"It is now April 9, 1865. Notice that the clipper ships are all gone—sunk during the war or sold abroad to escape the Confederate blockade runners. And look at the people pouring out of their houses and surging up and down the streets. They have just heard by the new electric telegraph that General 'Stonewall' Lee has surrendered and that the War is over. An early example of the mass hysteria which became pandemic a few decades later.

"Lock your seat belts good and tight this time—especially you Martians who keep squawking about precession sickness. We're off on another long hop. We're heading for New York as it is in 1953, just before Blowup. Ready?

"On our right is the Hudson once again. On the left you'll see Lon Giland Sound for the last time. (It becomes a lake, you know.) Those things flying toward us up-river are primitive army planes.

"Notice how the population has spread out. Millions of people now live with the Indians in little towns with names like Mamaroneck, Poughkeepsie and Tuckahoe. Why? Well, the story I heard is that, on Labor Day, 1953—Labor Day, you know, is the only day when New Yorkers word hard—on that date, when millions of motor vehicles were bringing millions of people home from their labors, downtown New York traffic finally jelled. For days not a vehicle could move an inch. People didn't dare abandon their cars for fear that the tires would be stolen. . . Stolen, sir? . . . I suppose the word means something equivalent to our 'borrowed'. . . .

"Anyway, thousands of people starved to death guarding their cars. After that the 'back to nature' movement started in real earnest. Too late, of course.

"Directly below us is the tallest skyscrapper ever built—the Empire State Building . . . How's that, miss? The noise level is rather high in here. Why were they called skyscrappers? I suppose it's because, after the Blowup, they were torn down for the scrap metal they contained.

"Antiquarians tell us the Empire State was constructed as a mooring mast for one of the first crude space ships. This 'dirigible,' as it was called, proved to be impractical. Only one was ever moored to the building. Later the structure was converted into office cubicles. That slim spire at the very top was added to serve as a beaming point for TV, an early form of tri-dim.

"As we circle, ladies and gentlemen, take a last look at those skyscrappers. I wish I could show you how they fell, but our radiation shields aren't strong enough for that.

"Now I want you all to watch the tri-

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dim screen behind me. You're going to get an unusual treat—a three-dimensional closeup, in color, of the people of New York in 1953. And the Interplanet Service offers you a special, added attraction on this tour. At absolutely no extra cost to you, not only the sights, the colors and the sounds of points-of-interest but, thanks to the wonderful invention, the Smelson Indicator, the very odors of our historic future-past are brought right to your noses. No other tour can do this. The Smelson is exclusive with our company.

"Will they be pleasant odors? Well, uh, madame, I wouldn't go so far as to say that. They will be filtered, of course. Here, I'll lend you my handkerchief, just in case your gills start to flutter.

"Keep your eyes on the screen, please, as I press this button. Didn't I tell you! You are sensing the central part of the city, the part known as Time Square because of a large clock on a nearby skyscrapper.

"Notice the childish animated signs . . . Chevrolet . . . Gillette . . . Camels . . . Semanticists tell us those words had some tremendous compulsive power on New Yorkers but their magic, and even their meaning, have not been deciphered. Even more puzzling are those huge nude statues across the street from the sign reading 'Astor Hotel.' Scholars suggest that they represent the god and goddess of pleasure. Broadway, the street running diagonally through Time Square, is called the Great White Way, a term denoting revelry.

"To the far left, observe the building that seems to be made all of glass. No, not *that* one sir. Farther to the left and ahead. The structure I refer to is on the Sound. It serves as headquarters for the United Nations, a forerunner of our own United Stars. Sit down, kids! I've told you before it is not necessary to salute every time I mention the name of our government. You'll get yourselves hurt!

"That roaring sound is New York traffic during a comparatively fluid period. I'm sorry the odors are so unpleasant. They are a filtered replica of New York's atmosphere. Scientists believe that fetor contributes a great deal to the pugnacity of the 1950's. I'll tune them down a bit more.

"Our pilot signals that he is about to take evasive action. Before he does so and we hop to post-atomic New York, let me bring you a final close-up. Notice that saucer-shaped boat putting out from the southern tip of Manhattan? That is a Staten Island ferry. Let's see if the Smelson's good enough to zoom down and pick up just one of the commuters crowded against the rail. Here we go, folks . . . Stop yelling, madame. You're still safe in your seat. It's just the usual tri-dim effect . . . All right now? I'll go slower this time.

"See their sooty, tired faces? Hmmm! That's odd. They all seem to be holding eggs in their mouths! Oh, I get it. I get it now. They've sighted us. They're yelling.

"Maybe I can tune the Smelson a little sharper. There! A father and his young son. Father's had a beer. No, he's had several beers! But what's that other atrocious odor? Grape? And look at the boy's mouth. A bubble is protruding from it. Ah! I remember! Grape bubble gum!

"What are they saying to each other? Quiet, ladies and gentlemen. This is an historic occasion."

* * * * *

"What the devil is that thing up there, son?"

"Aw, pop. Doncha read th' papers? It's a flyin' saucer."

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

phone he is able to use by himself. For him, at least, the machine has won some small measure of the human dignity which is essential.

This editorial was not intended as a sermon. Its purpose is not to point out how lucky *you* are, or to make you feel ashamed that you have done so little with so much more. It was done in honest admiration for man's indomitable spirit and in the renewed hope that the much maligned machine might receive something of its due as the vehicle by which men may reach for the stars.

ETHERGRAMS

OF MEN AND DONNYBROOK

by Tom Pace

Dear Sam'l:—I've just finished reading the January STARTLING, and I find myself writing my first fan letter in many a month. The reason? Crossen's MY OLD VENUSIAN HOME.

I'm a Southerner. I was born in Tampa, Florida. My father is of a fairly old Alabama family, and I lived for eleven years in Talladega County, in Alabama. I was edcuated in Atlanta, at Georgia Tech. For sentimental reasons, and because of the climate, I would rather live in the south than anywhere else. Florida first, then Georgia and Texas and New Orleans.

I'm white. That is, I have a pale skin. I don't know enough about my ancestry to state . . . but I understand that I am French-*cum*-British, Welsh, Irish, and Scotch. I have blond hair and blue eyes.

I realize that Crossen's story was satire, and pretty good satire. Perhaps my sharp reaction stems from the fact that I have been subjected, ever since I came to the University of Michigan as a research assistant, to a steady barrage of kidding about Southern mores, about Klansmen, and about unreconstructed Rebs. Perhaps it comes from a subconscious feeling of guilt at the very real injustice that *does* exist in the South . . . I try hard to be a cynic, but I've an unhappy feeling that my subconscious believes "No man is an island . . . !" But whatever the cause, I found myself standing on my hind legs, swearing bitterly, and flailing around with the glass of bourbon-and-branch in the hand that didn't hold the magazine.

'And it boils down to this; I simply refuse to admit, even as satire (and remember, I said it was good satire!), that a group of influential, presumably well-educated men of the year 2076 will be subject to the kind of prejudice Crossen writes about. *Now*, yes. I've seen it. I know it well, believe me. Not mobs and lynching and hooded riders, (Although I've known of that, and I have a Model 81 Remington waiting for the first night rider that shows up within range of me . . .) but just the quiet, leaching intolerance that Hobson wrote of so well in "Gentleman's Agreement": the insidious attitude of superiority. But please God, in the next hundred and twenty-four years . . . !

Maybe I'm an optimist concerning Mankind . . . but I feel it will go. I feel that it's going now. And I feel it will be a natural process. You can't legislate these things (I know, I know, that's the demagogues' argument! But it is, and everyone knows it is, true!). They will come about solely due to individiual reorientation, such as mine, or due to the simple replacement of one generation by another. . . .

We—all Mankind, I mean—are paying for economic expediency and for the hysterical viciousness of the Reconstruction . . . and the price we pay is the one thing that we, as a species, cannot afford to pay. Ignorance.

A Negro for President? I can name at least one, right now, that has all the qualifications. Ralph Bunche. If he ran, and I didn't vote for him, it would be because of lack of agreement with his policy, his platform, his associates . . . not because he was a Negro. If I voted for him, it would be because of agreement with what he had to offer the nation . . . not for any other reason.

Sure, there'll be isolated cells of hatred and prejudice left by, say 2076. Plenty of them. But by then they'll be mainly the psychotic fringe . . . the people who have to have an artificial superiority to keep themselves from complete breakdown.

The South? Look at South Africa, one of the most outstanding examples of Aryan fascism in the world today!

Now!

Since I've been in Ann Arbor, I have met a good many fine people. I have met a good many prime illegitimates. And the proportion is about the same as you'll find in Atlanta, or Lansing, Michigan, or Biloxi, Mississippi, or Toledo, Ohio, or Homestead, Florida. I have never, even in Atlanta, encountered individuals —common, ordinary, run-of-the-mill people— who are quite as vicious as some of the people I have run afoul of in Detroit (Unfair, perhaps; Detroit is something of a pesthole, anyway). Prejudice is something not confined to any one section of this enlightened country.

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Race riots? Have you ever heard of Chicago?

I am willing to admit that the Negro gets a much better deal—on the surface—in the North than he does in the South. But if I were a Negro, I don't think it would be long before I saw through the thin pretense afforded by mixed seating on busses and the like, and began to notice that the "good" bars and restaurants of Detroit oddly never seem to have Negro customers.

Maybe I've just been hit too often with the snide "Oh . . . you're a *Southerner!* gambit. And from people who wouldn't speak to a Negro, or a Jew, or an Indian, for that matter, on the street if they'd worked in the same lab with him for years. Okay, I'll admit it; I'm tired of being treated as a sort of a ravening beast in Human form because I speak with a drawl . . . and even more tired of meeting smug so-and-sos who assume, because of that same drawl, that I have my Klan dues all paid up and my robe hung up in the closet!

I am an individual, and I like and dislike people as individuals! I claim the right to hate a man's guts if he's black and a nasty individual, or to like him if he's a good guy and bright green!

And if I like bourbon and quail-hunting and drawling voices and Dixieland music and the Florida swampland and the Georgia hills, I am going to enjoy them and no piddling comfortably-and-subconsciously-Aryan intellectual is going to say me nay!

A pox on all their houses. If the allegedly Human race had evolved the concept of complete individuality several centuries ago, instead of hanging happily on to their meaching little religious or racial or national nestings, then we'd all be a lot better off today.

I know you people, decided to terminate the race question in the letter columns. But print this, anyway. I have a selfish motive. I have few things to really work my ire off on, and maybe if this is printed, I'll get letters from a few characters like that particulary septic specimen who used to write in . . . the one from Kansas. You remember him . . . it.

Maybe some of the boys will drop around in person. Oh, happy, happy day! Do you know what a Donnybrook is, Sam? Of course, I might find myself out in this godawful cold weather . . . my landlady has said, firmly, no more uproar and smashing of furniture.

But think how much good it will do my soul. . . .

The magazine? Ah, yes. I liked Crossen's story . . . in spite of what the names and the sentiments did to my blood pressure. Senator Beauregard, indeed! Crossen is funny. But for heaven's sake have him even it up by writing one about prejudice without an accent!

Knight's novel was fine . . . one of the best written, most interesting stories I have ever read in SS. This, Milford, is adult, matured science-fiction. Like THE LOVERS . . . except that, as a story, I enjoyed this one better than Farmer's trailblazer. Incidentally—for your ego—SS has taken over that particular digest-sized mag's place in my favor.

I found Dee's NO CHARGE TO THE MEMBERSHIP delighting. Please, you Visitors, don't overlook 109 N. Thayer, Ann Arbor. Apartment 2. Don't knock, just try the knob. The door's only locked for special occasions.

I also liked THREE-LEGGED JOE mainly because of the two misplaced research-types wandering around, coming within inches of killing themselves. How well I know . . .

The cover . . . right nice, right inspiring. Incidentally, Sam, I'm on that cover . . . I hope I am, anyway. No, I'm not one of the boys kneeling in prayer, nor yet one of the group pushing up a flag. I'm the chap standing there waving like hell at the other ships.

Incidentally, how about getting Schomberg to write out the field equations for the anti-gravity those ships are using, huh?

I liked the rundown on the Chicago convention. I've been reading an awful lot about that particular party lately, and I'm drop-kicking myself all over the landscape (an odd trick, you must admit) because I didn't attend. I could have gone to Chicago that weekend, too. Damn! What an idiot I was . . . where did you say the next one will be? I'll be there . . . with a case of Grandad. Philly? Hell, I've got a couple of friends now engineering around Philly . . . fellow Georgia Tech Pogo-fans . . . when will it be, huh?

Back to Dee's story . . . can you imagine a shipload of Visitors settling down on a hotel full of fen busily getting loaded, leering at Bea Mahaffey, and doing whatever else they did at Chicago? Come to think of it, that's a hell of a good story idea! Stay clear, boys. I thought of it first, I think.

The letter column . . . oh, yes, the letter column. First, though, anent Bixby's reported comments on wing-flex of airliners . . . Bix, old boy, my ex-roommate down in Ft. Worth owns a beat-up old BT 15, and he's trying to talk me into flying to Alaska for bear-hunting . . . you think a DC 4 (or whatever) was alarming? You should try a flying trip with Tommy Holman some weekend . . .

I have a long, obscene story about Floridian-Texan bear hunters and BTs and long cross-countrys, but I won't tell it. Aren't you glad?

Mary Dickinson's letter is the first exciting thing I've ever known to come out of New England. Miss Dickinson, meh dear, I own a great deal of old stf, from the 1927 AMAZING on through the years . . . I *knew* that junk would come in handy some day!

What a letter! The printed equivalent of a picture of Marilyn Monroe . . . subtle, but loaded.

". . . girls, too, if they want to bother."

Miss Dickinson, I love you. You are just what fandom needed.

It seems so recently that there was all

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sorts of talk about Why Isn't There (Aren't There, I mean) Female Fans? Now look! Not only are there hundreds and hundreds of them, but they are writing, I'd say, some of the most interesting letters in the columns . . . *even* without the sexy note they are interesting. Complaining? Pace? You're crazy!

By the way . . . who was it making comments about female stf fans being the physically uninteresting type? Not long ago, as I remember. Well I've only met two femfans (Ug! Pace, *you're picking up the language again!*), and they were both—*are* both—plenty interesting, plenty gynoid, and plenty classy . . . which, of course, is not illogical. There isn't, despite the Bluestocking Myth, any incompatibility between intellectual curiosity and good thighs and/or breasts. So let us not be silly, boys. Where do you think Finlay gets those models?

When Tex Holman, Ray Bernardo, Dewey Courtney, (Miss) Rusty Silverman, Bud Miller, Warren Heath, myself and a few others, finally get our spaceship drive licked, we'll invite all and sundry to the christening party . . . through the pages of SS and TWS and their competitors, of course. Look for the ads, you people . . . in a few years. Should be a good party. Then we can load up our gear, not forgetting the jugs and a few records (after all the wonder begins to wear off, I've an idea a few relaxations might prove a psychological necessity on a flight!) and take off in the general direction of Mars. Not the moon. Holman says Mars, and he'll probably be navigating. And Bernardo, who is an architect, already has the first Martian-Floridian ranch house down on drawings, I understand.

This is enough of this letter. You'll hear from me again, Samuel. And look for our announcement.—*Apartment 2, 109 N. Thayer St., Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

We've uncrossed our fingers now. We'd been holding them that way, hoping the Crossen story would smoke out a letter like this because we knew there had to be one in at least one of our readers. And if you get the idea that we're kind of proud of the crew that reads SS you may be right. A letter as intelligent and forceful as this is worth all the headaches incidental to it. But you can take the chip off your shoulder now, Tom. You know Crossen's story wasn't aimed at you. It was aimed at the professional Southerner—and he exists in every state in the Union, not only the South. I've spent considerable time south of the Mason and Dixon line myself, and I've met plenty of people down there who talked as you do. However, chauvinism dies hard, and if by the year 2076 Negro prejudice has died, I am cynically sure there will be something to replace it. (Summer Cottages for rent. No Martians allowed.)

At least you got something off your chest which has been on it a long time; maybe you feel better for it. I have been tempted many times to join you in your toast: a pox on all their houses.

Speaking of Mary Dickinison—guess what we got for Xmas? A Marilyn Monroe calendar. Brightens up the old office no end. But what traffic suddenly!

SOUTH OF BOSTON

by Glen Daniels

Dear Mr. Mines:—Thank you very much. I say that every month as I buy the current issue of STARTLING, but this month, you have such an exceptionally good story in that I had to say it in person.

Namely, MY OLD VENUSIAN HOME. I hope that it will be met by the rest of the readers of Science-fiction with as much enthusiasm as myself.

I won't re-hash the turbulent era of the early 40's of the fans who were championing the abolishing of color distinction, but say merely that I am glad that someone has at last managed to beautifully prick so-called white superiority. (Incidentally, to any of you Southern Gentlemen who are now seething—I am quite white, but not unduly impressed about it.)

I just happened to think—with this new concept, myriads of possibilities of new stories can be used around it. I might even attempt one myself—I would, that is, if I wasn't so darn lazy.

Although having read STF, lo, I don't remember, was it before Chaucer or was that kindergarten? I do not recall the name, Crossen? Who is he? And if he's new, why didn't he start before? But it doesn't matter—as long as he can write like that—please, just more of him.

This being where I came in. Thank you very much.—*28 Huntington Ave., Boston, Mass.*

Up to a couple of years ago Ken Crossen was happily (I think) writing whodunits and was a big wheel in the Mystery Writers of America. His conversion to science fiction seems complete—in fact he thinks most detective readers are going to wind up in science fiction.

THE MAD MARTIAN MADE

by Marian Cox

Dear Sam:— Aside from the fact that it

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looks ridiculous to have a brass-brassiered babe and a heavily space-suited male on the same cover, the publishers of science-fiction magazines are missing one important fact. Sure, I know the gals are supposed to attract potential readers, but there are female readers too, y'know. And at the moment, the female population outnumbers that of the male. Something like 12% more females than males, I believe. Why not attract a few of these readers?

Now, I'm not saying that a handsome hero on the cover will automatically make Priscilla Pruneheart, the old maid, pick up a copy of the magazine and become a fan overnight. But why shouldn't it attract a few new readers simply because it's different? Remember the story of the man who kept a huge grandfather clock in the hall? Every night at midnight it would peal out the hour in twelve ear-shattering strokes. The man slept right through it, although neighbors frequently complained. Then one night the clock didn't chime. The man was out of bed like a shot. "Who," he roared, "made such a helluva noise?"

So a male on the cover—and not one of your usual bundled-up men, either—ought to take a few people by surprise and make them sit up and take notice. Why don'tcha try it?

Aren't you glad we have only two sexes? Imagine having *three* sexes to please!

Although to be perfectly fair about this thing, I suppose we should use an unclad BEM or two, to please the eye of other BEMS Hmmmmmmm?—*79th A. B. Sq., Sioux City, Iowa.*

Run, do not walk, to ye corner drugstore, or wherever it is you purchase your copies of STARTLING STORIES, with a two-bit piece clutched in your warm little hand, plunk it down on the counter and tell the man to reserve for you a copy of the May issue of SS. For you, mad maid, and for the 12% of surplus females, we have prevailed upon artist Popp to immortalize a brawny male on the cover wearing even less than the female who is with him. Less? —yes. Males don't have to wear bras, do they?

BETTER SEIBEL. . .

by L. D. Chandler

Dear Sam:—Although, why I should address you so affectionately, I don't know. What a dirty trick. Sammy—I'm revolted. I'm nauseated. How you could do such a thing. . . . That letter in the Jan. ish of TEV. Such tripe. . . . In fact, any self-respecting tripe would rebel, as being placed in such a category with that letter.

I'm referring to the one, so sweetly written, by Miss Dickinson. 'Member-? . . . The one that said STARTLING was a 'lovely' mag. I can just see her swooning over all the 'cute lil ole letters from all the cute lil ole boys. Wha' hoppen? Did you have a hangover that day and didn't give a damn, what kind of letters, you put in? You must have had some reason, otherwise. . . .

And another thing. She doesn't seem to be able to make up her mind. One sentence questions the aptness of discussing sex in a magazine. A few sentences later, she goes to great detail to build up a picture in our minds, of just how sexy she looks in her comfy lil ole playsuits.

Better we should have Seibel than this.

To get back to pleasanter fields. Your January ish. I liked. (Maybe that's why I raise so much hell about the simple minded letters, you get. I can't find any fault with the stories, and I just gotta let off steam someplace.) Although I was sort of left up in the air, when I finished OVERDRIVE. Maybe it could be I skipped something—Yes? Have to go back and try again.

One very sincere complaint. I'm getting a green streak and I don't like it. Everyone is raving about the Chicon. I wasn't there. (Sighhhh) what I wouldn't give to have seen the glass in the hand of Bixby, charging through the lobby. In fact, even a glass in my own hand and I'd have been happy to stay in one spot and *just look*. Maybe I'll make the one next year in Phila. Anyhow it's closer to home. . . .

Liked also, Shom (why do I always spell his name wrong?) Schomburg's cover, illo. Did you know that guy is pretty good? Hmmmmm. I thought you did. Were the the little men in the center of the cover, Marines? The pose seems vaguely familiar and I'm wondering why?

Gotta stop for now. Gonna write some stories, so that I can send them to publishers, so that they can send me rejection slips so that I can write more stories on the back of the rejection slips so that I can send them to the—Ad Infinitum.—*Rock Hall, Maryland.*

Of course the pose in the middle of the picture was familiar—it was a deliberate paraphrase of another famous flag-raising, Iwo Jima, wasn't it?—Intended to show how this symbolic gesture may be repeated in stranger circumstances.

But getting back to the Dickinson letter —L.D., the best I can do is to refer you back to Tom Pace. He got the point too well for me to start over again now. It wasn't a hangover; it was something even more deadly.

LAST HOPE

by Joe Gibson

Sszam: I dunno. I jhust dhon't khnow.

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Look—am I a pro like the rest of you Untouchables, Sam, or am I a f ffan like that guy poking his big nuzz into this page, here? I've a story hitting the newsstands as I write this, and two novels appearing soon after this is (?) printed, and there's the middle of another 70,000 words next the typewriter—so should I, Sam? Should I criticize stories written by Damon Knight? Or Murray Leinster?? Or anybody else, except when it's the crud turned out by Yo' Bhoy Gibson???

Yet but a few weeks ago, Les Del Rey is telling me he's finicky about using the term "Joe Fffan" anymore—I might sue him for libel! (Of cows, I told 'im I could probably think of something better—)

There was a Thing down in Philadelphia last Nov. 16th, tho—and it *wasn't* Les Del Rey. Where wuz he at 9 a.m. on Nov. 16th? Not on any Greyhound bus, he wuzn't! Ask Dave Kyle—*he* wasn't, either! Ask A. J. Budrys! Anyway, we couldn't let De Camp's whiskey keep dissolving the paper cups. And Peggy Gordon was looking more beautiful than ever. Dave Hammond was looking more than ever. And Bob Lowndes' wife wore a leopard-skin skirt—Sam, ole pal, how does one become an editor?

But more Things were astir. For example, who would you consider the best choice for Guest of Honor at a World Science Fiction Convention? For the 11th, this year, I think we've got him: Willy Ley.

I'll just let you sit there quietly, for a moment . . .

We're going to miss Bergey. Not only on the covers, but back here in the letter-column.

And trimmed edges? H'mmmmm. But did I know that some femme fans think I wear a halo? (I will NOT use the term "fam" until the gals okay it—I'm no fool!) Like a Crossen charact—Saaaaaaaam! I just remember *which* Crossen characters *had* halos! And they wore green derbies on their—SAAAAAAAAAM!!!

But gad, me in a *halo*? Y'mean—Wow! NOT EVEN A WRISTWATCH??? Ooh, goodness—but I write cute letters, too, y'know. Umm, yez. Ahem! Yeah, I guess you're right, Sam—there's Pat Kovacs saying Charles Atlas stripped and look where it got him. Ah, me. That nude calendar didn't do Marilyn Monroe any harm, either! H'mmmmmm? Patricia, dear—twvvzz—how does one whistle via typewriter? Oh, well. Maybe we can get Merry Dickinson all nice and cool and comfy, eh? Y-e-a-h.

And I am *whose* last hope?

Tsk. Like when Ralph Wade is in the large print, saying KEEP SEX IN THE BEDROOM AND NOT IN THE S-F MAGS. Wonder where *he* keeps *his* s-f mags??? And there's Twinkle Marsh saying she doesn't like us saying the "average" (?!!??) female is dumpy. What about us hollow-chested, knob-kneed, stoop-shouldered males? One thing more beautiful than Rita Hayworth, tho—and most American gals have it—is a sense of humor. So c'mon, Twinkle, dump it with us!

Besides, there's the nice, natural way most of 'em carry it around, y'know. Arrrrgh!

A halo for *Gibson*?

So I jus' wanted to see my name in italicized print. Looks nice, don't it? Ah, well. I subscribe to THE FEMZINE.—*24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N. J.*

Maybe you're a pfan—which is a combination of pro and fan. It's possible, isn't it? De Camp and Pratt and Farmer write letters and so does Ray Bradsbury, though I haven't printed any of his in the colyum because of other personal content, so why not Gibson. Of course, you out-write all those other swamp critturs. What you need, Joe, is two hats. When you're a fan, you put on the fan hat—that's the usual beanie with the propeller on top—and you can criticize authors. When you're an Author you comb your hair down over your eyes and wear any battered old felt which has seen better days. If the days it has seen were not so much better, so much the better. And Joe—you're welcome to come up and see our Marilyn Monroe calendar.

DENIQUE

by Robert Coulson

Dear Sam: A word of congratulations. When I began reading stf. in 1948, SS and TWS were two of the top three 'zines. Later they began to slip, not so much because their stories became poorer, but because new mags had better stories. Now, under your editorship, they are climbing back into the top ranks. Stories such as WHOEVER YOU ARE, THE LOVERS and THE LONG VIEW are top-notch. I could do without Crossen, but he's a minor thorn.

By the way, Sam, just what does "denique" mean? It ain't in Webster's Collegiate.—*R. 2, Box 65; Silver Lake, Ind.*

Denique means "at last" in a certain dead language once spoken on the banks of the Tiber and still used to a limited extent by patent medicine bottlers and other men of science. Didn't mean to baffle you.

SOAPBOX HARMONY

by Jim Harmon

Dear Mr. Mines: This is a letter to the editor in the newspaper sense, Sam. I've been listening to the radio and I've decided that there are a lot of stupid people where they

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shouldn't be who don't even know the difference between a democracy and a republic, and are a bit fuzzy about where freedom ends and totalitarianism begins. Now maybe this doesn't have anything to do with science fiction—except that statism usually clamps down on fantasy—it can be too easily converted to point out morals in satire and fables. And too, the letter columns of STARTLING and WONDER are some of the places that still permit almost unlimited freedom of speech. I think that's part of what I pay my quarters for. Yeah, and I'm beginning to worry that science fiction isn't going to be the same—like a lot of other things—if things keep on like this.

We got troubles. We, Americans; that is. Russia is waiting for our economy to collapse and pick up the remains—and of course put a greater strain on that economy and our morale and our military strength with baby wars and political undermining. But that isn't our greatest trouble. After all, Russia's whole political philosophy is based on the Death-Wish—disillusionment, revenge, lack of ambition and advancement, destruction, stagnation. Being implicit in all life, this naturally appeals to some people of, like nature, but the Death-Wish must ultimately bring about its own destruction. On the other hand, Americanism, capitalism, republican democracy, is Sex-Drive—advancement, creation, independence, even the sometimes misguided instinct for group protection. As such, it is directed towards unlimited achievement and is virtually indestructable. Nope, Russia isn't our biggest trouble. Our biggest trouble is us—the American people.

We're so damned stupid, careless, and impressionable. Not that I deny us that right. One of the noblest rights of liberty is the right for the public to be wrong—collectively if not individually. Some well-meaning starry-eyed totalitarists want to protect the public from being wrong, but they don't realize that letting the public be wrong is a check and balance to keep government from toppling—and insure personal and public freedom of government.

Yeah, we are a free people with free choice in a free country—and we apparently elect representatives of appalling stupidity, characterlessness, and unhealthy fear of the ever-changing whims of public opinion.

You have probably heard the rather disastrously sickening news that we haven't or aren't working on an artificial satellite. Oh yes, there was some talk and a little paperwork but nothing beyond that. And the politicos *admitted* that they were announcing this had been done because they were *afraid* that the *public* would *disapprove* because of thinking that huge amounts of money were being expanded on such a wild idea. Fear of public opinion . . . *that's* supposed to be a good reason for abandoning a vital defense project and a notable achievement in the progress of the human race! Nuts! It's not too comforting to think that behind the Iron Curtain they don't have to worry about public opinion and can go ahead with any project logical by the ruling circle. More and more people are beginning to think that space flight is logical—and necessary.

Then there's the matter of guilt by accusation and association. Needless to say, our concept of justice is that better a thousand guilty men go free than one innocent man be punished. Obviously we have *already* reached the point where some believe it is better that a few innocent men suffer some slight injury than that many badly guilty men go free. This is of course a mockery of whole judicial system. It can mean only that we are beginning to accept the incredible wrongness that it be better for one innocent man to suffer than a thousand guilty men go free—or a thousand innocent suffer than one guilty escape. Under this concept, legality, freedom, the constitution and above all, Justice, can mean nothing.

Then there's impending government censorship to establish "purity" in books and periodicals. Obviously, government censorship of any form of the written or spoken word destroys freedom of speech and press. Those freedoms denied, the others have no foundation for existence. One publisher has told the distinguished senators who find certain comics, pocketbooks, and girlie magazines provocative and so want to end two of the Four Freedoms, that sexy novels merely give the public what it wants to read and satisfy their curiosity about certain things, so doing the public a service. What both senators and publishers have apparently overlooked is that the Facts of Life are the Truth and like the facts of art, science, history and government they are secure in that the Truth can not forever and for long be hidden—or denied. I disagree with some of the things Phil Farmer said in THE LOVERS like I do with Phil Wylie, homosexual club manuals, communist propaganda, and so forth—but I'll defend their right to say it with my pen and voice—and knife and gun, and honor and life, if necessary. Excuse my adolescent melodramaticism. I guess I'll fold up my soap-box and move along.—*427 East 8th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill.*

It's too late now, or we'd have gotten you a brand new soap box for Xmas. No, I'm sorry—it's not fair to kid someone who is making sense at least part of the time. So few of us do. You might add to the troubles which afflict us in the realm of unrealistic thinking the "lived happily ever after" nonsense with which we've been indoctrinated. We cling to a childlike belief that everything is going to turn out all

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right; we judge people not by what they are and accept them for what they are, but by what we think they should be. And, of course, we live in a double-standard society anyway, which confuses everybody. But it gives room for a lot of kidding, no?

COMPLAINT

by Art Lay

Dear Mr. Mines: This note is not at all complimentary. It is realized that an editor is in the business to make money and not to print, primarily, good stories. I as a purchaser of Startling Stories have no desire in your profit margin, only to read a soundly written story; it seems that a compromise is in order.

Your editorial on Page 13 of the January 1953 issue—"This Matter of Maturity," is being held against you for your version of maturity is but a version of story adolescense. Your release of THE BOY WITH FIVE FINGERS should have been a two or three paragraph editorial comment and not used as a fill by making a story of it.

Years ago science fiction in general was interesting, loaded with scientific possibilities, thoughts and analogically stimulating. Today the entire SFM world is gutted with drivel. It so happens I have picked on STARTLING STORIES which is unfair of me. All the SFM's are on the same level of degeneracy.

Mr. Mines, this is what I expect in a science fiction story, "An excerpt from the laws of Matter, Motion, Energy, Time, etc., briefed into a target of accomplishment and carried through the story soundly." A bit of Yak Yak with a semi-nude dazzling beauty undergoing a climatic condition without discomfort, which by the laws of our science, would either burn, eat or destroy the flesh covering her bones, or due to temperature and pressure, would implode or explode her body. But no, she is enjoying the environment with the utmost composure. If she is a girl—yes—she should be a beauty, the less garments the better but why not make the connection on the level of a SFM mind? The basis of any story should be the imagination of one's mind living momentarily, the accomplishment of the feat and solution and not be confused with irrelevant fill.

What has happened to the old masters of dimensions, chemistry, vibrations, ultra and super sonic disturbances and those concepts which were so basic and sound?

The few mags I might purchase makes no difference to your firm nor do my comments, etc. But, Mr. Mines, should a SF editor turn out GOOD STORIES at $1.00 each, I'd buy every one. The SFM's sold today are worth 10 cents each in my market—and it is too bad, for I've bought SFM for years.—*318 N. Mariposa, Los Angeles, California.*

Even in "uncomplimentary" letters, which we have always encouraged, we have frequently been able to find some small ground of at least partial agreement. But in the recurring question of the good old days versus the present we not only take radical and violent difference; but we refuse to grant the opposition an inch.

The old stories were interesting, yes. They explored a lot of pioneer territory in the way of Matter, Motion, Energy, Time and so on. But because they were pioneer material, and because they were exploring, they were also groping. They were frequently poor stories containing cardboard characters and unreal dialogue with creaky plots and unconvincing events. There is a hard-rock core of science-fiction fans who are not at all disturbed by this. They are, actually, not interested in story—they revel in a thinly disguised lecture on Physics. George O. Smith commented recently on the fact that ten years ago when he included a machine in a story he had to insert what amounted to a detailed blueprint, while today he sketches in the working principle in a single paragraph or so and lets it go at that. This undoubtedly seems horrible to you. But while we consider ourselves well in the van of this movement, you mention that it is unfair to pick on SS, since all the other stf magazines are doing the same thing. Obviously then, this is a spontaneous movement, not a plot. And if so many writers and editors who have been so long connected with the field have come to this same conclusion, they must be pretty sure that this pattern for stf will give more enjoyment to more people than the old.

The fact is that stf was due for humanizing. We are doing on a larger scale what Ted Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Margaret St. Clair and a few others have done for a longer time. These were the artists of the field as opposed to the engineers. It should be obvious to you that we will never have a real literature in science fiction until this humanizing process is complete—until we have stories of real people against a science background, instead of science lectures with puppets.

And, as a matter of fact, I think you often get just as much science in a modern

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story as you did in one of the old—the difference being that you get so much more drama that you tend to overlook it. Example? How about TROUBLED STAR in the February SS?

I hardly expect to convince you. But I do have a solution. For you, FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE and WONDER STORY ANNUAL were born. They reprint the old stories. Go forth and find them and be happy.

FEELING FANDOM
by Paul Mittelbuscher

Dear Sam: In the Jan. issue of one of your competitors known to the majority of fen as "Madge" Dick Clarkson spoke on the vast difference between said magazine's letter column and that of either of your publications. Having never meditated on the subject to any extent I made a rudimentary investigation of Dick's theory and was not surprised to learn he was correct. In case you don't make a habit of reading stf mags other than your own, Clarkson said that the one thing that distinguished TWS and SS from the others is the presence in full regalia of many of the BNF's month after month. It's true that TEV is usually dominated by the sage comments of such worthys as Gibson, Gardner, Harmon, Hammond, Cox, Warner, and the August person of Seibel. In general these fen have something interesting to say on most occasions and I for one do not urge "that heads roll," keep the present group of letterhacks by all means.

However there are bound to be gripes from the "cheap seats," many fen dislike any catering to a favorite few, to these dissenters I address the following . . . (before I climb on the soap-box however I ask you to bear in mind that I am by no stretch of the imagination a "neofan," and that I read practically all the fanzines and thus have an opportunity to acquaint myself with a huge number of fans, both of the well, and *little* known categories).

And yet . . . OF THE 29 letters published in the Dec. Startling only (get this) 15 were known to me. In other words, I KNEW SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN "HALF" OF THE LETTERWRITERS. 14 of them were completely unknown to this person. I think that should prove for all time that TEV is not a personal "correspondence corner" and that you, Sam DO NOT use it for "chit-chat" between yourself and friends.

I'm inclined to agree with what Dick said in "Madge", many of us do enjoy reading the efforts of our correspondents, there is no greater thrill Sam, than seeing a letter from some one that is a neofan humbly asked to correspond with you, and whom you have watched grow onto a full-fledged letterhack, it almost makes you feel like a father. You have that wonderful feeling of "Why, I knew him

[*Turn page*]

TO PEOPLE Who Want to Write

but can't get started

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—Elmer Carroll,
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when....." Even if the guy has been at it longer than YOU, there still is an extra boost in knowing that you can "read between the lines" (Knowing the guy so well helps you to get hidden meanings from his letters). How many of you can remember when Planet's letter column was the official "stamping grounds" of the acti-fan, Planet usta be a place where a fellow could take down his hair and really get the FEEL of fandom, its pulse and its beat. Now it's the "Twins." Amen!

Well, I relinquish the soap box to you, dear editor, any closing remarks you wish to add? —*Sweet Springs, Missouri.*

If you knew half the letter writers in the December issue you knew a lot more than we do. The idea that this column is a bit of personal chit-chat between ye ed and some of his friends—*friends,* did you say? Who could be friends with Seibel? But anyway, here's how it works: Fifteen or twenty-five thousand letters a month come in. We discard the requests for donations, offers to sell baby chicks and real estate ads and weed out ten thousand or so which simply say, "I like your magaine. Keep up the good work." Then, without even looking at the signatures, we pick out the letters which have something interesting to say. If this batch happens to have a lot of the same names with fair frequency it only means that these kids write good letters most of the time and have something to say. Personally, we don't care who writes the letters—we're after the best letters regardless of who writes them. This should be so obvious that I blush to repeat it—what? Sure I can blush. A little out of practice maybe, but I can.

THE DELIGHTFUL CREATURES
by Patricia Ann Kovacs

Dear Sam: Please pin the Legion of Honor on Miss T. Marsh! It's about time someone protested the treatment STF writers give women in their stories. TOO MANY fictional women are portrayed as spineless jellyfish. The few hardy ladies who manage to bear up under adversity are either superhuman mutants or specially-trained from childhood to bring them up to the alleged level of male fortitude. Besides which the vapors went out with Comstock and Victoria.

At least give us credit for being human.

We're getting tired of being dissected, bisected, psychoanalyzed, probed, prodded, cussed and discussed. Just accept us as the delightful creatures we are and let it go at that.

And stop trying to put a Halo on Joe Gibson!

What has the boy done to deserve a stab in the back like that, Sam? If you will poll your feminine acquaintances you will find that all of them, given a choice between a Saint and a Rake, will take the rake 9 times out of 10. Your wife chose you, didn't she?

I'd like to have Jim Leake in my hands for about 15 minutes. I'd really educate him. So Messer Leake thinks the "old bhoys" didn't know anything about women . . . and I suppose he does? He's either a fool or a liar. In any case he talks too much. He hasn't made one statement wherein he proved he knows any feminine psychology.

Don't get the idea, though, that I don't like men. I love them. I even married one.

And I predict some smart-aleck is going to extend his sympathies to my husband if this ever sees print. Well, I can answer that, too!

In closing, may I repeat my request for masculine-looking men on the covers? Since you liked the phrase "walking bundles of laundry" so well, here's another—parambulating rag-bags.—*119 N. Sutphin Street, Middletown, Ohio.*

The reason for the fumbling portrayal of women in fiction is a hangover from the days when women were considered mysterious. We know better now—we have even begun to explore the idea, gingerly, that they are human, though many sound writers think this is going a little too far. Many men are still a little afraid of women. Was it G. B. Shaw or Alexander Woollcott who said, "The way to fight a woman is with your hat. Grab it and run?"

I'm not pinning any halos on Joe Gibson—it was a gal who did it. And incidentally, do you know my wife?

MAGAZINES FOR VETS
by (Mrs.) Peggy Kaye

Dear Sam: No cheers or jeers at this writing. I just want to pass along an idea to those who may not already have thought of it.

Many readers have complained about having to get rid of an accumulation of S.F. magazines. I had been discarding them as finished, until I got the idea of phoning the Veterans Hospital and asking if the boys would be interested in reading Science Fiction. The answer was a great big enthusiastic "Yes!" Since then I've been saving everything I read and when I have a dozen I send them in. I realize this may not be a terribly original thing I am doing but I thought I'd mention it in case some of you haven't thought of it yourselves.—*74 Copen Street, Dorchester, Mass.*

A sound enough idea. To this, Jimmy Taurasi adds a plea for magazines to send to Korea. The FANTASY VETERANS ASSOCIATION, of which he is Commander, has gone broke mailing magazines to boys in Korea. They have magazines,

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what they need is cash for stamps. If you have any to spare, from a dime to a dollar, send it to Ray Van Houten, 127 Spring Street, Paterson 3, New Jersey.

Readers are also invited to the 3rd Annual Fan-Vet Convention, to be held at Werdemann's Hall, 3rd Ave. and East 16th Street, New York, beginning at 12 noon, April 19, 1953. The usual auction of pictures and covers, including a rare oldie by Frank R. Paul from TWS and a Howard V. Brown will help send more magazines to men in Korea.

DEPARTMENT OF CONFUSION

by Richard E. Geis

Dear Sam: Of course the best story was DOUBLE MEANING by Damon Knight. In fact, the two stories featured on the cover were...this time...the two best in the issue. The shorts in the January SS were all very good. Nothing to be ashamed of, all interesting, no crud....

Just when I'm set to blast you out of your office with a double-barreled epistle if you print one . . . just one . . . more of those formula-novels-liberally-salted-with-"characterization" stories, you print a doozer of a yarn like DOUBLE MEANING. This story was *good*. And by good, I mean I missed a Milton Berle show on TV in order to finish it.

What?

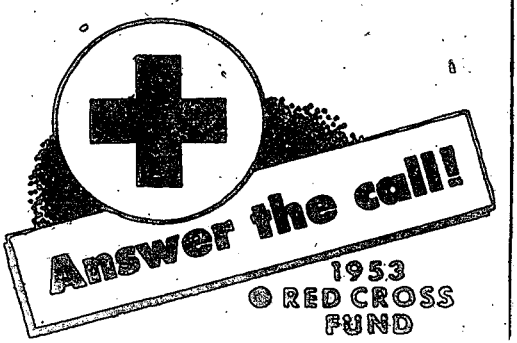
You say that is faint praise? You say that even Captain Future is better than Milton Berle? You say that only the lowest of the low like Uncle Miltie?

Sam, how can you say that about me? After all, I like *you* too. And I like your magazines very much.

You say that Milton Berle is a man who can only be appreciated by an intellectually superior few, and is by far the most humorous comedian in the country? And that anyone who likes you and your magazines is a discerning and cultured person?

But, Sam, you just said—— Hmmm. You

[*Turn page*]



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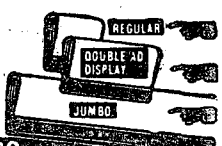

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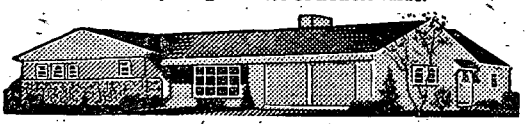

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know, I think you're right. I always thought I was a genius. Thanks for confirming it. Now I can tell my friends.

Seriously, thanks for the best story since THE LOVERS.—*2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon.*

What would you do? Naturally. We looked for a razor blade to cut our throat, then remembered that we shave with an electric shaver. Ever try to cut your throat with a Sunbeam Shavemaster? Messy.

OF TIME AND SPACE

by Tetsu Yano

Dear Mr. Mines: Can I entitle my second letter "No Need Spaceship Anymore?" I will write the reason later.

I thank you for your reply and your kindness that you published my fanny letter to your magazine which is not appeared in Japanese book store yet.

As to your information, Hogben's book which was published in Japan in a little changed title. "Science For Millions People." I had read it once, I will re-read it. As to the "1, 2, 3, Infinity," I will try to get it.

James Blish's articles "Our Inhabited Universe" is very interesting for me. When he could completed his article in one complete volume I want to get it. I think your company will publish his book.

Yesterday at a book store in Kobe I bought Nov. issue of FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE and its editor's name was you, so I was pleased.

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR is very good story, but I can't understand it a little. At first I can't imagine the constructure of the time machine, what is the next formula, $V-(R/m_2-R/n_2)h$?

As well as the author had pointed out in that story already, can Miss Dane kill Mr. Doon or not?

For me, even if the time machine were the imaginary product, it is very much unreasonable that one can act through the three-dimensional space through the past, present and future.

When I imagine the time machine, that's speed is necessary to have more speed than that of light. I think one may only act on the direct line, isn't it?

Is there any imaginary fundamental theory of the machine for the reason that one can act on any time, four-dimensionally?

If it were so, why we don't use the time machine when we want to fly to other planet? No need spaceship any more, isn't it? This problem is too complicated for me. Anyhow, THE GIRL NEXT DOOR is good.

THE DECIDING FACTOR—oh, my cold perspiration?

A FAMILY MATTER is also good. Several weeks ago I knew the word "cybernetics" in a newspaper's article column. I think that the machine-brain must only be to answer for

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human's order. Can machines be human's friend?

IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING is too much psychological for me. IT'S LIKE THIS—I like it, but it is a little childish.

THE GODS HATE KANSAS is very good, very much exciting, even though there are many difficult parts in the story, for one example the conversation between Curtis and his friend scientist in his laboratory after he had escaped from the camp. I can quite not understand.

Is it necessary to have more scientific fundamental knowledge to understand that conversation? Maybe the question lies on my English reading power.

Or it is because that the story is too fantastic and interesting and I wanted to read it more and more fast.

I am writing this in my tiny shop, dreaming the three people acting on the surface of Moon. I will read it up this night with pleasure. Had the SPACE STORIES Magazine already shipped to Japan?

Dear Sir, can I teach you some Japanese? ARIGATO SAM OJISAN means "Thank you, Uncle Sam." Good lucks to you and your mag.—*567 Yokoya Uobakicho, Higashinadaku, Kobe, Japan.*

Wish we had space to answer all these questions. Maybe some of your real letter writing fiendinfanforms will lend a hand here and explain some of these things. How, for example to get the idea across that there is no real fundamental formula for a time machine because there is no real time theory. Some inventors talk glibly of skipping through dimensions via space warps and such handy evasions; others use the "faster than light" gimmick to catch up on past events which is equally unreal. Time machines are only figments of the imagination—springboards for mental gymnastics. Can someone make it plain?

THAT MATURITY ARGUMENT

by Larry Rothstein

Dear Sam: Having just finished the latest issue of SS, I felt I had to let you know that I enjoyed your description of the Chicon more than almost anything else in the magazine. Since I have pretty well established the fact that I like all kinds of science fiction, I'm not going to comment on the stories except to say that I like the longer ones more than the others only because it takes me longer to read them and therefore I enjoy them over a longer period of time.

I've been wanting to insert my two cents worth into the maturity argument for some time now, but my ideas have never quite come to a jell until quite recently.

It seems to me a definition of maturity in science fiction is pretty much a definition of

[*Turn page*]

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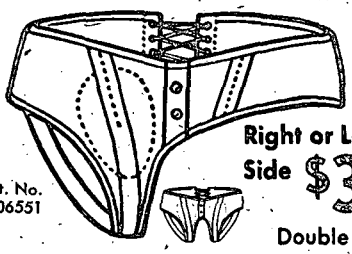

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good literature; good being used in the sense of overall excellence rather than in the historical sense of great critical acclaim over long periods of time.

Maturity is an evidence of the author's ability to write about occurences in such a way that they are plausible for the period by virtue of characterization and background. A mature story, to my mind, is one that makes me believe in the people and in the events. If the author can establish his characters in their era in such a manner that the era is a pertinent part of the "truth" of the events taking place, he has succeeded in writing a story which is good. Whether it will be considered classical is beyond us to determine because under normal circumstances, classics are established generations after their conception.

Therefore, any question of maturity in science fiction must be confined to the overall taste of the reader. If he likes certain types of stories to the exclusion of others, he will buy the magazines which print them. In this way he is being a critic and a critic in a most active sense because it is his money which keeps the magazines going.—*American Bridge Div., U. S. Steel, 71 Broadway, New York.*

In somewhat different words we have said much the same thing. A story to us is good if it is effective—if it makes its emotional, dramatic and logical points. It is mature if its ideas are reasonably adult, showing the results of thought and experience. Will any three people agree about what constitutes "adulthood"? Hardly.

WHERE IS EVERYBODY

by Trina Perlson

Dear Editor: Before I picked up the January issue of SS I had been a silent reader, just reading the stories and letters, but never voicing my opinion. Then I read MY OLD VENUSIAN HOME. Wow, Golly, Gee whiz! It was wondabobble. (Pogo, y'know.) I didn't know Ken Crossen could write anything as good as that. His characters (grr) were so miserable that I felt the urge to kill. Maybe it was because I know that there really are people living nowadays just like those senators but I nearly tore the magazine to shreds at my anger. (Down, girl, remember your blood-pressure.)

It's a good thing I didn't tear it apart though, or I wouldn't have been able to read the other stories. All the other short stories were good except THREE-LEGGED JOE. I especially liked WHO'S CRIBBING? The novel and novelet weren't too good, though. Funny, but I always seem to like the short stories better than the novel or novelet.

Let's see now, there must be something wrong with your mag. I don't want this to be one of those "I-like-your-mag-the-stories-are-fine" type letters.

Oh, yes. I have a complaint. Every month

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I dash down to the corner candy store, a quarter clutched in my hot little hand, to buy SS, TWS, FSM or SPS. Lo and behold, I am always the only one ever to buy a science fiction mag! No one I know read it and I never see anyone in store, street or subway with one under his arm. And yet at the end of the month all the s.f. mags are gone from the candy stores. Who buys them? I have a sneaking suspicion, dear Ed, that you hire people to go into the stores and buy them when you see any left. If not, WHERE IS EVERYBODY?

If there are any fen in Queens, pliz write and tell me. It gets lonely, being the only S-F fan around. I'm blonde, green-eyed, fourteen and I go Pogo. A girl, of course.—*109-11 127th Street, South Ozone Park 20, N. Y.*

Queens fans, it's up to you!

WILD COMETS AND NOVAE

by Daryl Sharp.

Dear Sam: (pardon the use of your maiden name): Did someone once compliment you on your poetical ability that you continually print that rank verse in TEV? What? Oh yes, I know music hath charms to sooth the snarly Seibel, but there is a limit and that limit has been reached! I hereby swear by the brilliance of yon Evening Star that I will tolerate no more of this childish drivel, damn the excuses! (note: this does not include illo, ish, fen, etc.)

However there is one thing about your mag which impresses me deeply and that is your cover, all in general and the January ish in particular. To me these covers tell a story of their own, regardless whether they illustrate one in the book or not. I must compliment Alex Schomburg especially on his creative genius. Since you changed your cover format your mag has displayed the most striking exterior of any of its kind on the market. Many of my s-f friends agree with me on this point. Please don't disappoint us in future issues.

To Jim Leake: Know why Sam keeps bandying words with such characters as Semenovitch, Seibel, etc.? 'Cause it provides us loyal fen with a constant source of amusement and that "tune in next week" quality, much akin to soap operas. Personally I, as reader Szold, look forward to the regulars as a sideline of entertainment, not taken seriously, in any event. So don't rleax that grip, Sammy boy! (psst, Snarly, write me and I'll tell you how to break that hold!)

Glad you're trimming your edges. Not that they improve the quality of the stories, but appearances are important, especially to gain new readers.

Bye for now. Despite my "constructive" criticism, you can bet that wild comets and novae couldn't keep me from buying your next ish. I'd enjoy hearing from fen who'd like a teen-age pal in Canada.—*R.C.A.F. Greenwood, Nova Scotia, Canada.*

[*Turn page*]

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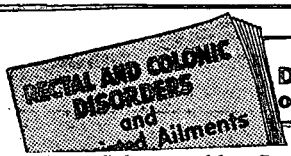

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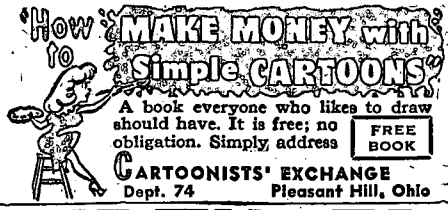
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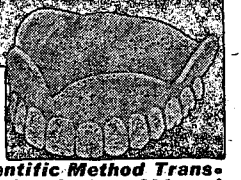

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Time's run out again and oodles of letters are left. Like: Graham B. Stone, of Sydney, Australia, compliments us on trimmed edges but doubts anything much can be done with a magazine named STARTLING STORIES; Mona Lee Rhines, Route 1, Alger, Mich. says she understood THE LOVERS and she was only 13 when she read it. (14 now.) Edward Wellen of New Rochelle, N. Y. makes anagrams out of the names in de Camp stories; Klaus Kaufman of Newburgh, N. Y., writes with appreciation of Earle Bergey; Dave Hammond got a kick out of the Chicon editorial and beats the drums for Philly in '53; Joe Keogh of St. Catherines, Ontario, thinks maturity in stories is okay, but rates SS above the competition for its warmth and humor. (He also enclosed a poem, but we hid it.)—Bobby Stewart (a pun a month) wishes our name were Noon instead of Sam so he could say "High Noon" in stead of "Hi Sam."

A. J. Ausman sends poetry clear from Anchorage, Alaska—him big Alaska sourdough; Florence Wold of Chicago thinks everybody should read science fiction because our world has only about 50 years to go; Carol McKinney wants to know why she can't get SS and TWS in Provo, Utah; Delray Green, of Muncie, Indiana, has a theory that Seibel is really kind at heart (ha!); Andrew Gregg of Chippewa Falls, Wisc., says everybody is still hepped up about THE LOVERS; Earl Downey, Route 2, Gadsden, Ala. needs a December SS badly; N. G. Wansborough, 84 Wyke Rd. Trowbridge, Wilts, England, is starting a fund to help 100 British fans get to the '53 Philcon, wants donations of prozines to turn into British cash.

Ray (Pogo) Thompson asks if that was an editorial in the January issue. Who knows? Ray Capella says someone thinks we are related because he mentioned that Uncle Sam would be calling him soon and they thought it meant—you know who.

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Mrs. H. D. Bayles Jr., of 215 N. Auburndale, Memphis, Tenn., says we're just jealous of Seibel, wants to start a snob club, but thinks it's beneath her; Charles Baird of Springfield, Mass., wants an anniversary issue of SS in Jan. '54; Joe Semenovich sends a note about Bergey; Fred M. Larmay Jr. of Flint Mich., sends along a general feeling of good will; Robert Schmidt of MIT picks on THREE LEGGED JOE, pointing out that even a super-conductor is limited in its ability to carry current; L. D. Park, Dryden, Ontario, Canada, has back numbers to sell; Eunice Shaver of Houston, Texas, wants to give a necktie party for Seibel; Norman J. (the original) Clarke of 411 Mayfair Ave., Ottawa, Canada, wants no confusion between himself and any imposters—and so on, far, far into the night.

Which way is out?

—The Editor

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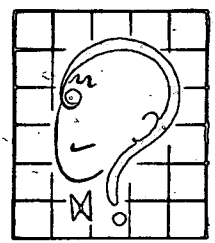

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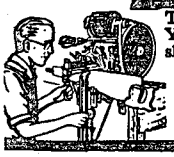

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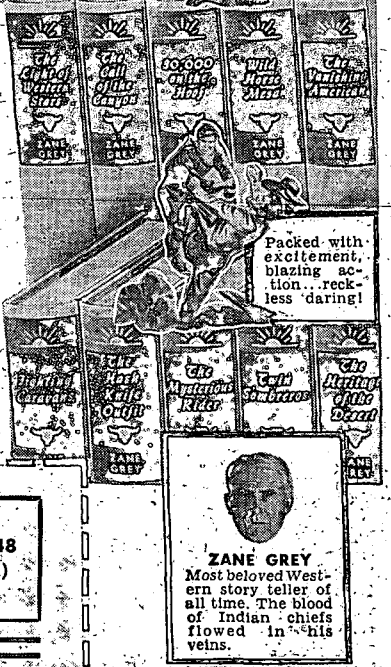

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